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Kister

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(54) **PROBES WITH HIGH CURRENT CARRYING CAPABILITY AND LASER MACHINING METHODS**

(56) **References Cited**

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(73) Assignee: **MICROPROBE, INC.**, Carlsbad, CA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 864 days.

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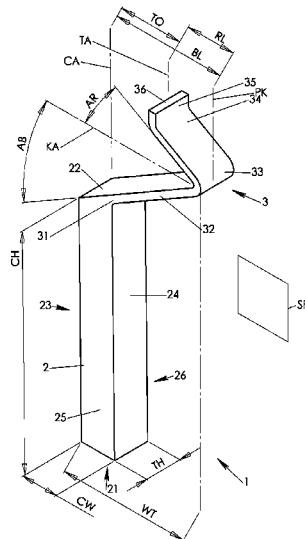
(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **G01R 1/06716** (2013.01); **G01R 1/06738** (2013.01); **G01R 1/06761** (2013.01); **G01R 1/07357** (2013.01); **G01R 3/00** (2013.01); **G01R 1/06733** (2013.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention is a probe having a distal end made of one material, a tip and a portion disposed between the distal end and the tip that is a different second material. The probe is laser machined manufactured using a nanosecond or picosecond laser.

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 324/755.01–755.11
See application file for complete search history.

18 Claims, 70 Drawing Sheets



Related U.S. Application Data

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- (60) Provisional application No. 61/628,012, filed on Oct. 21, 2011, provisional application No. 61/314,492, filed on Mar. 16, 2010, provisional application No. 61/276,411, filed on Sep. 11, 2009.

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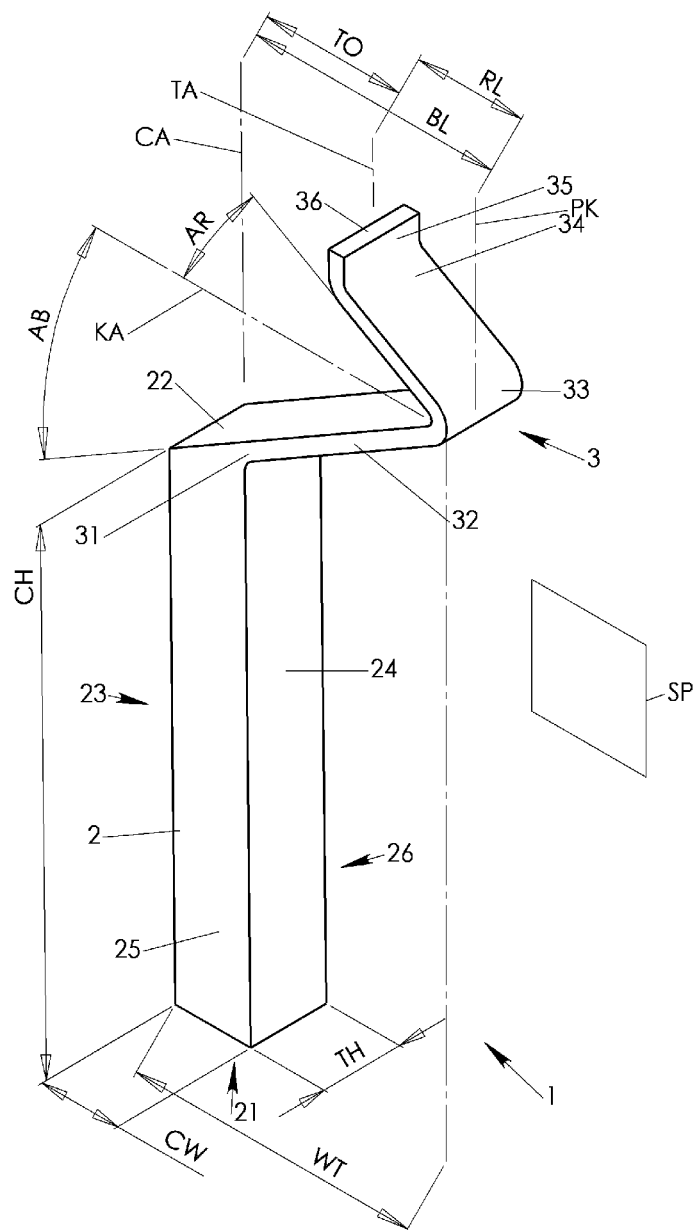


Fig. 1

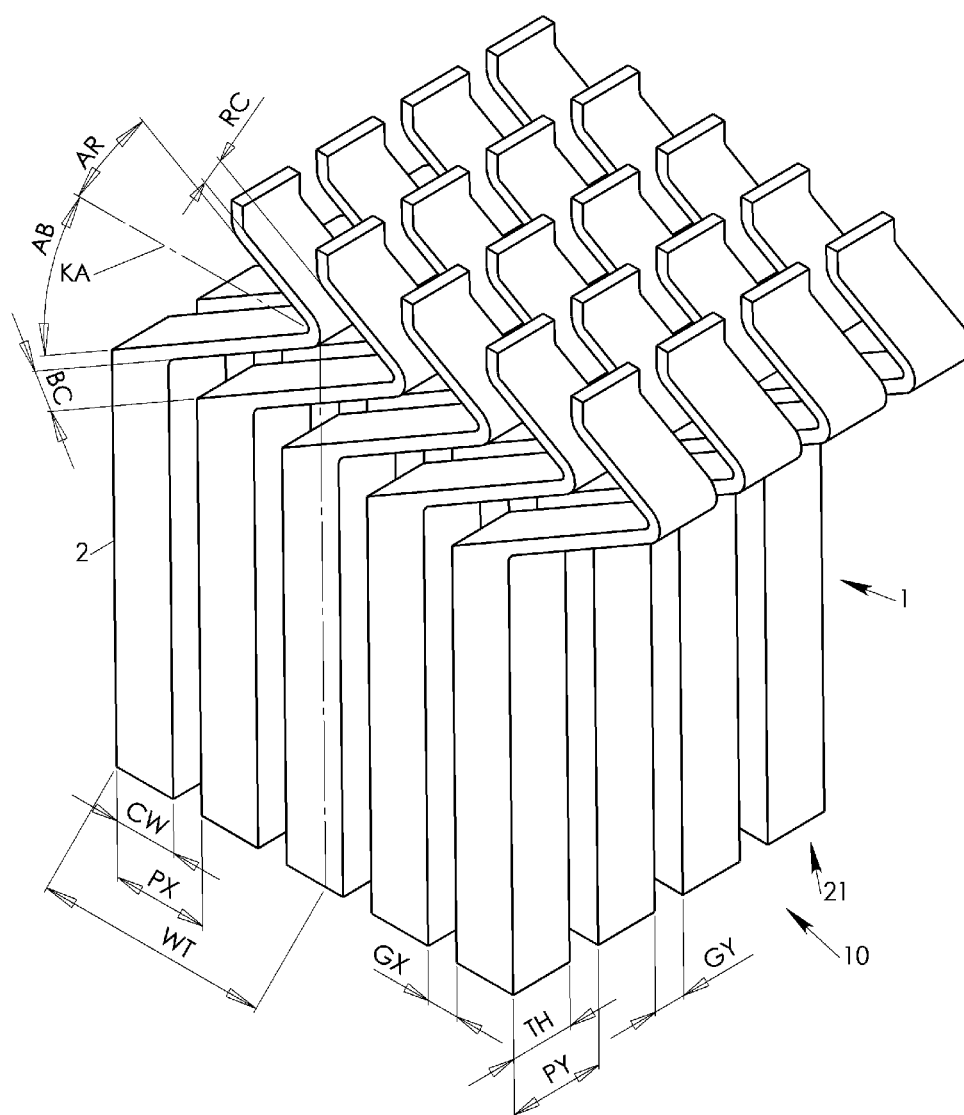


Fig. 2

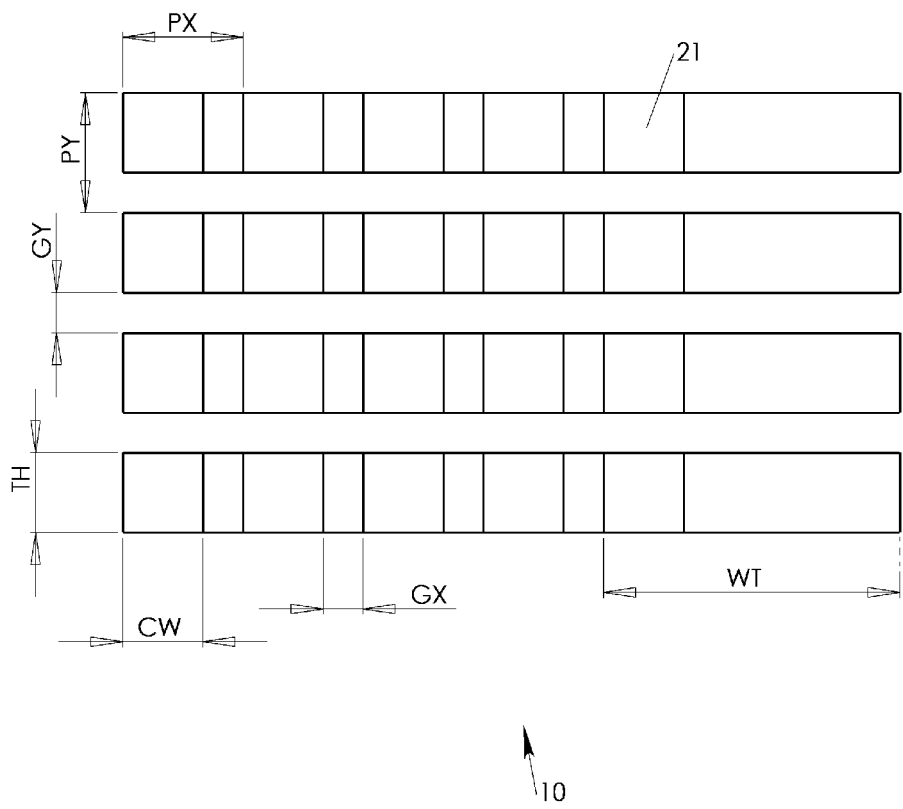


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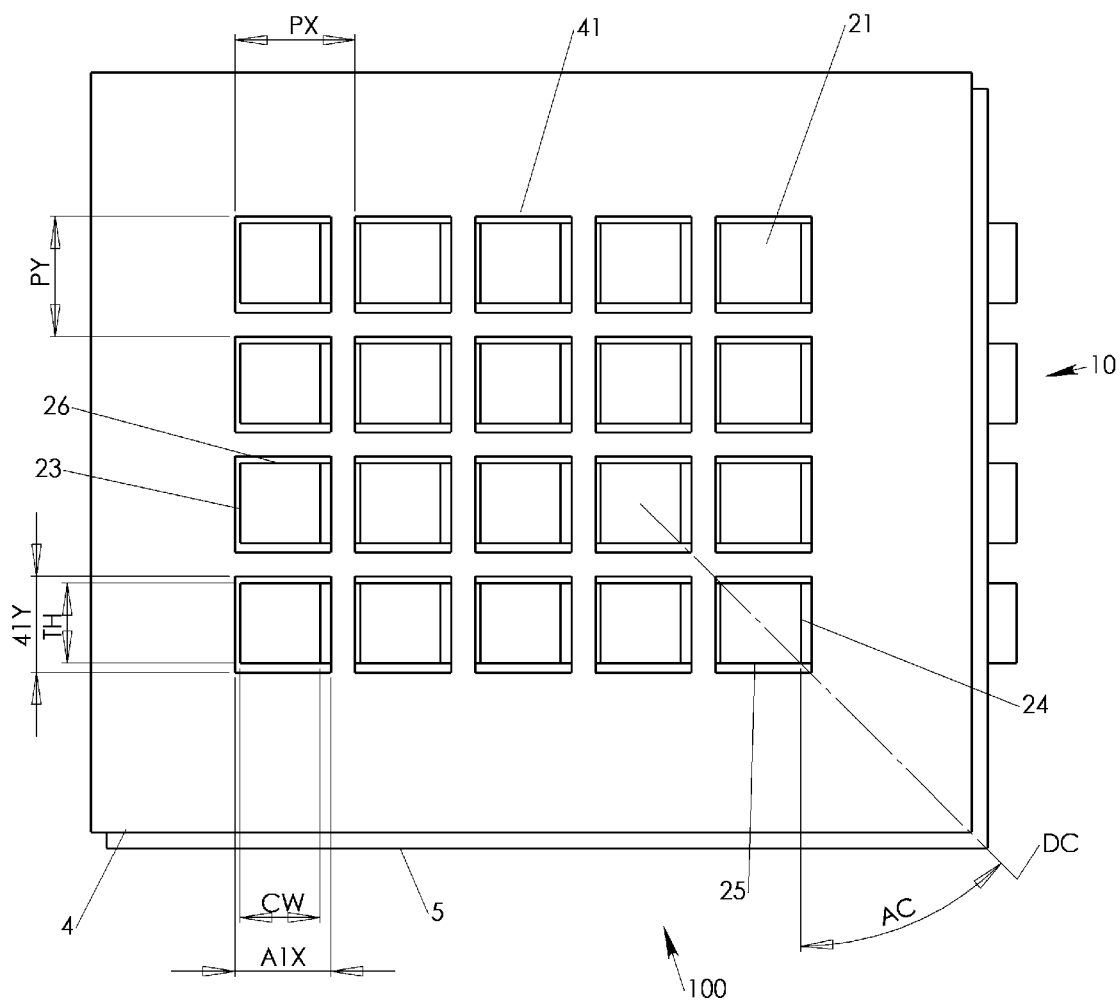


Fig. 4

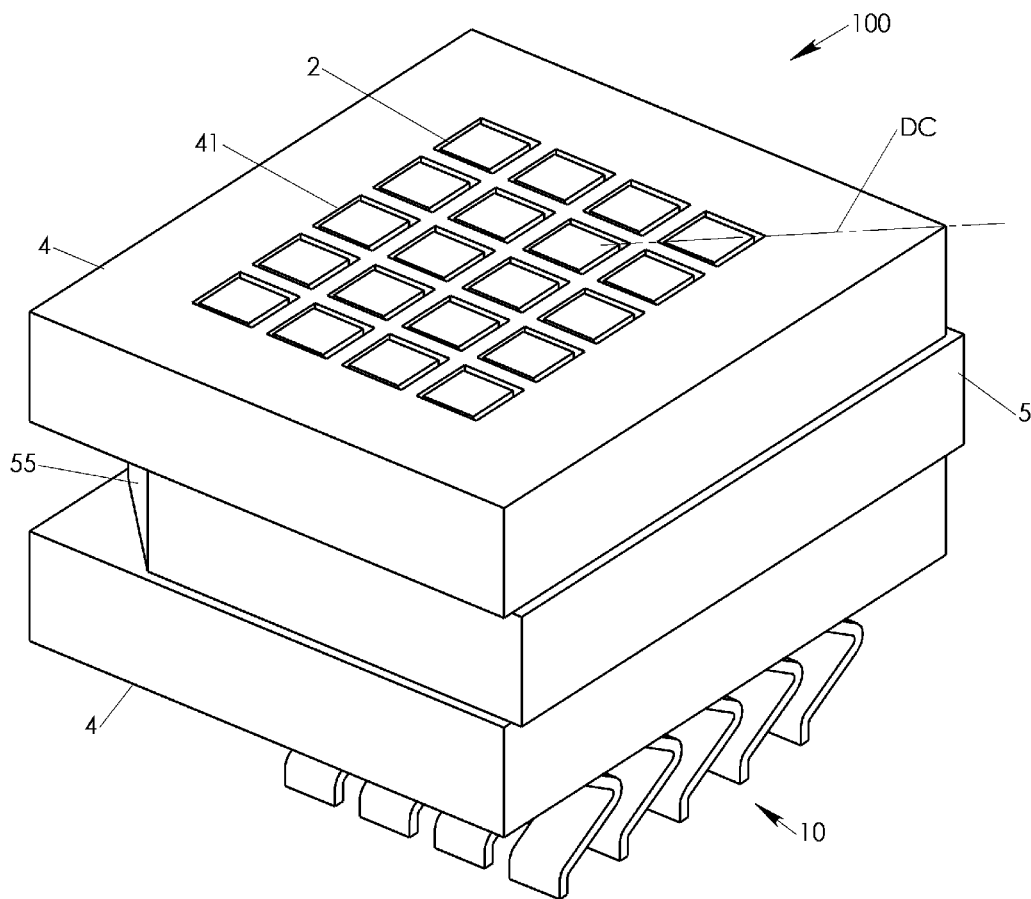


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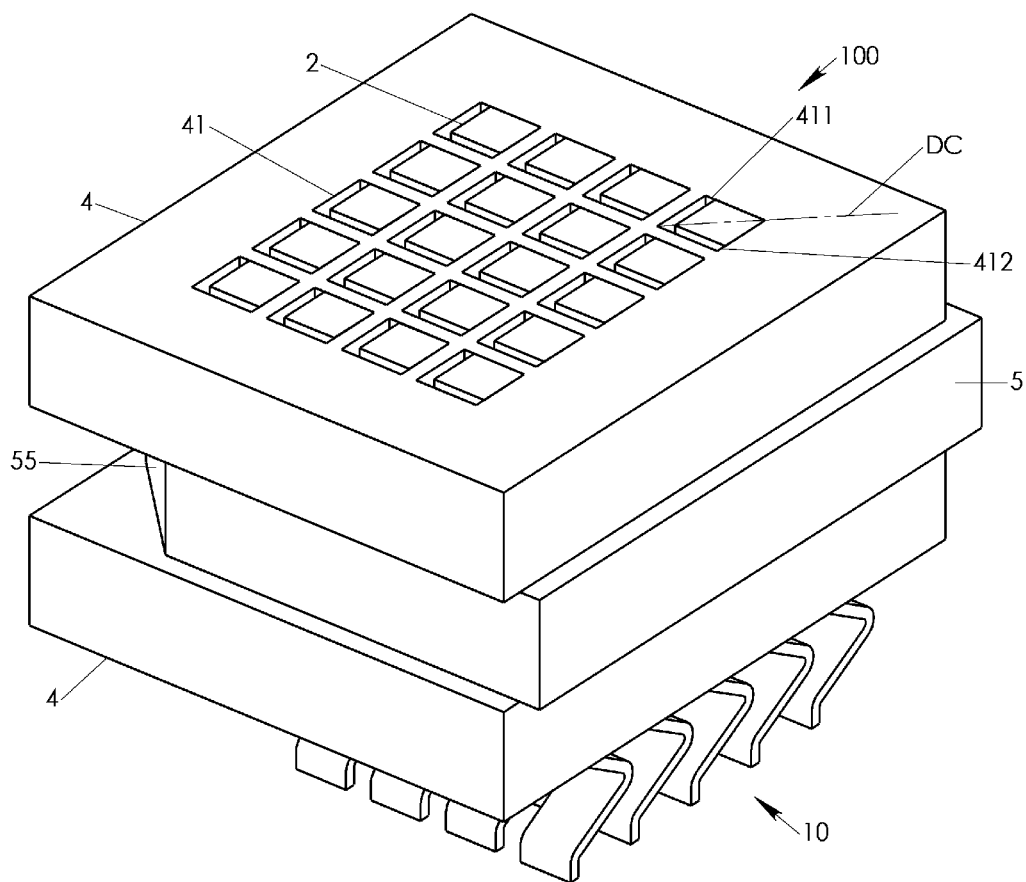


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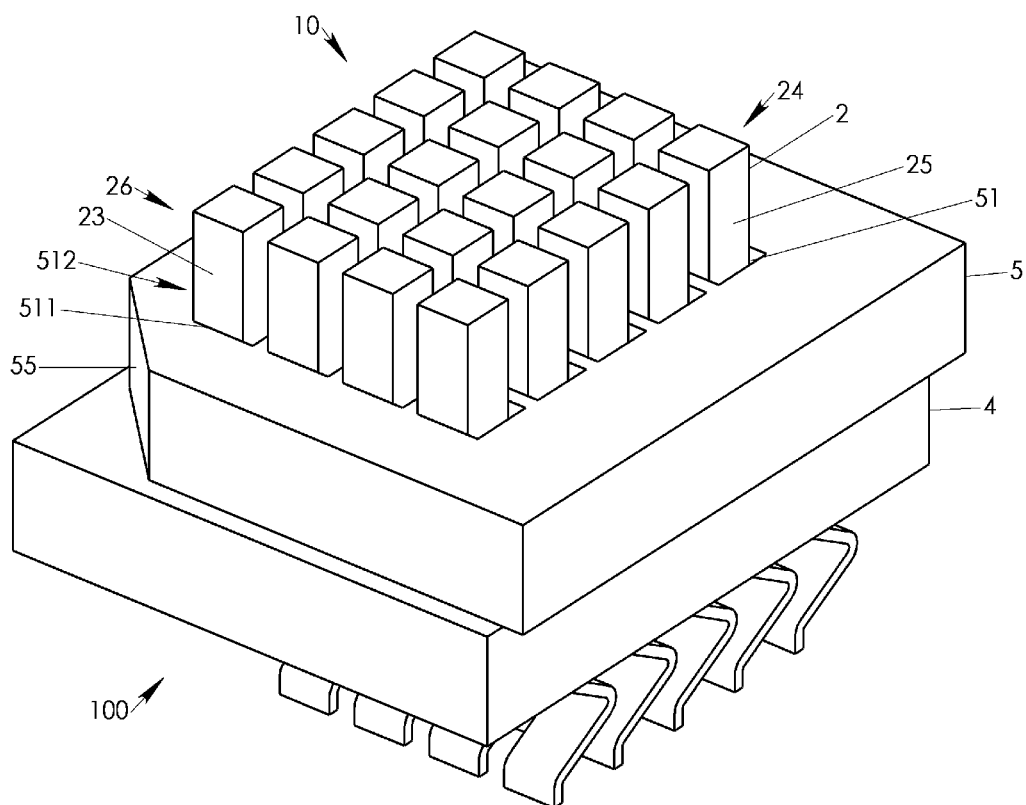


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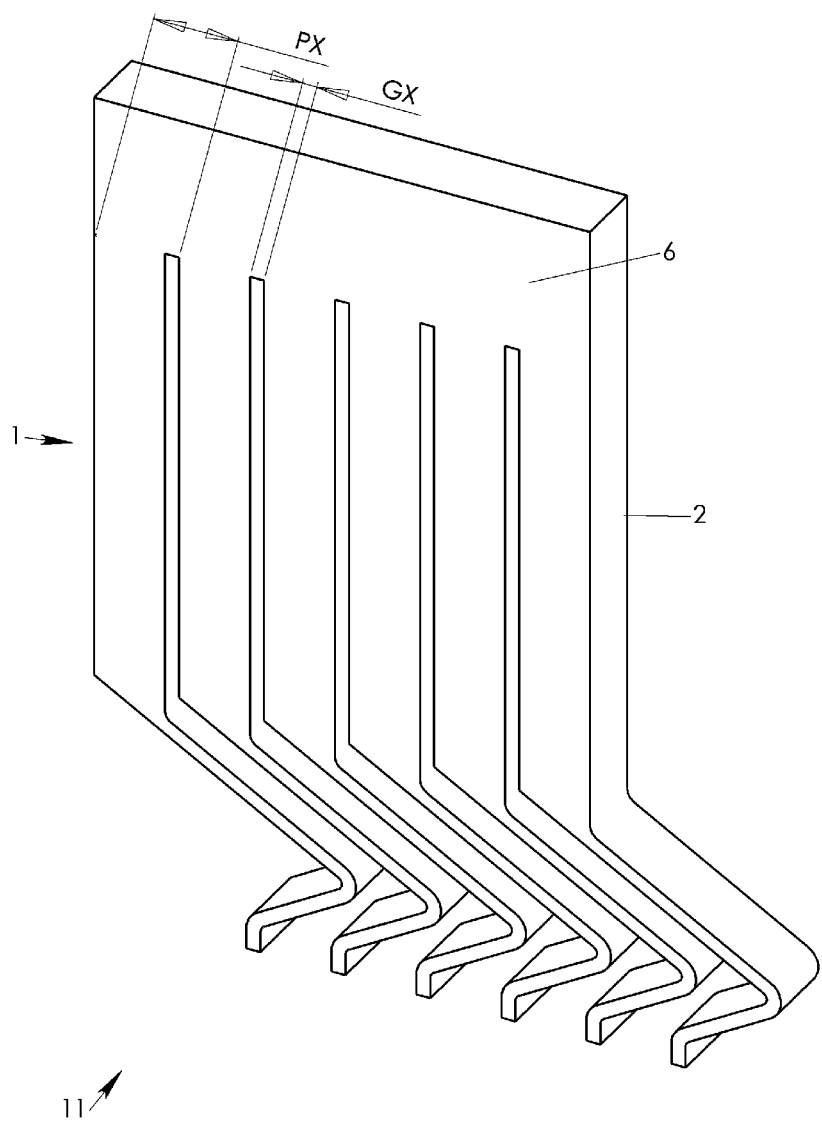


Fig. 8

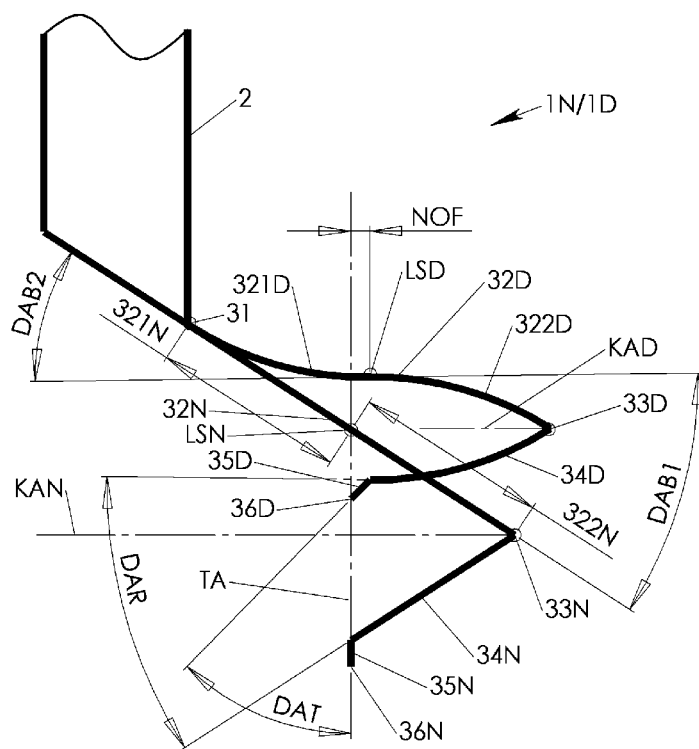


Fig. 9

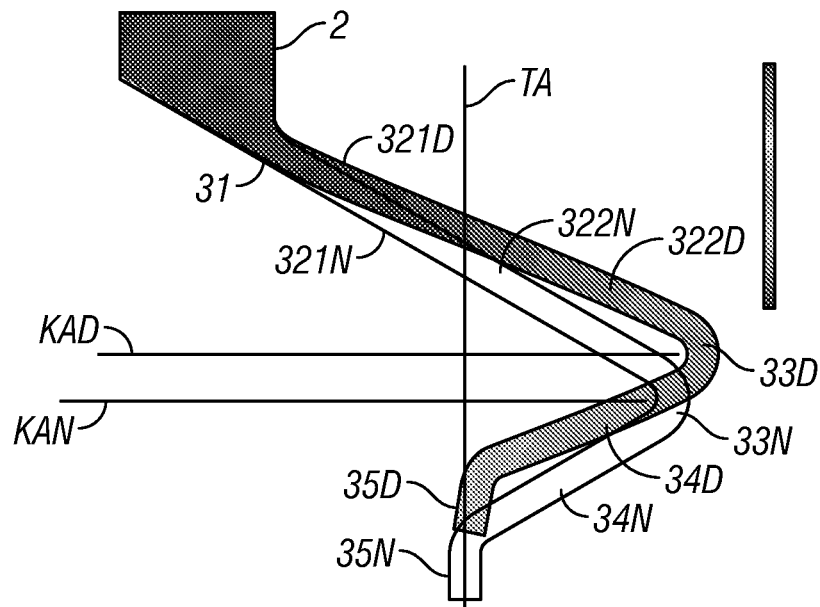


FIG. 10

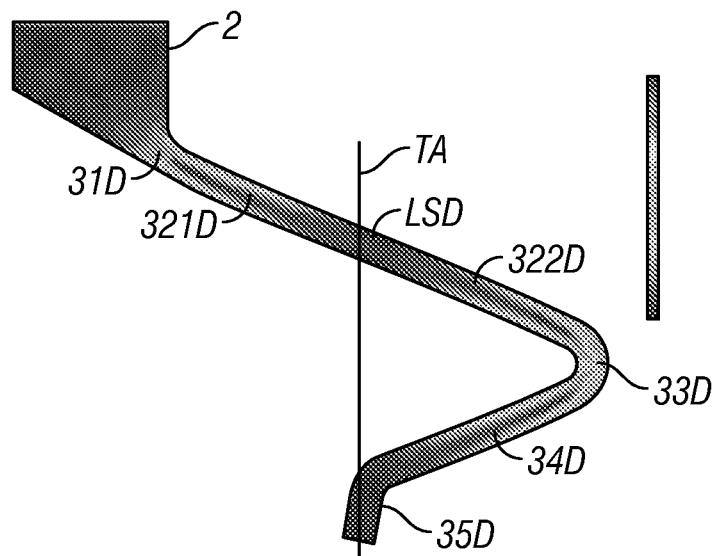


FIG. 11

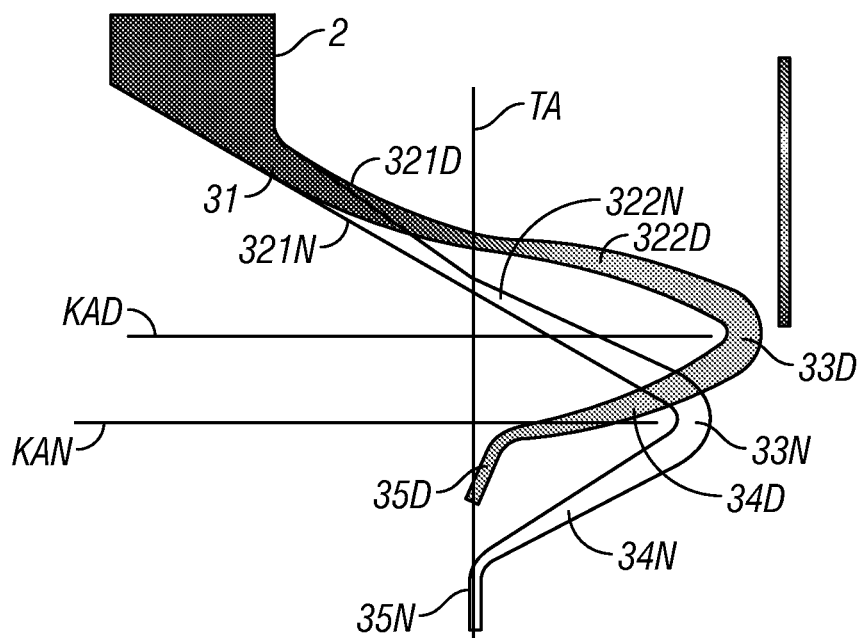


FIG. 12

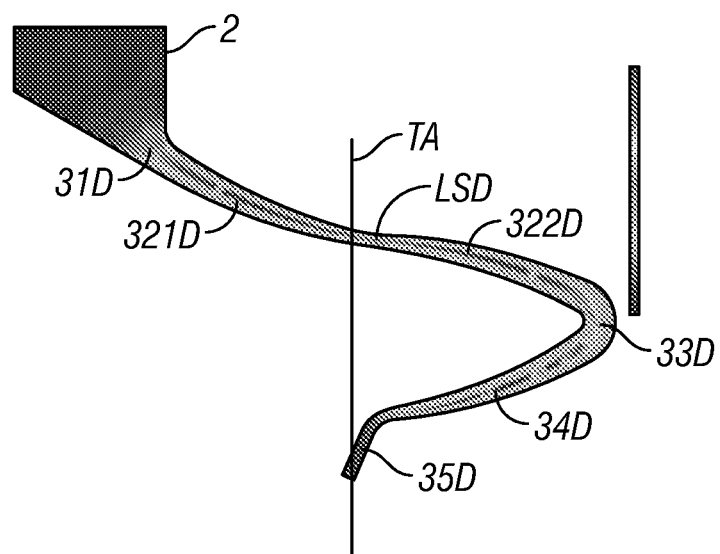


FIG. 13

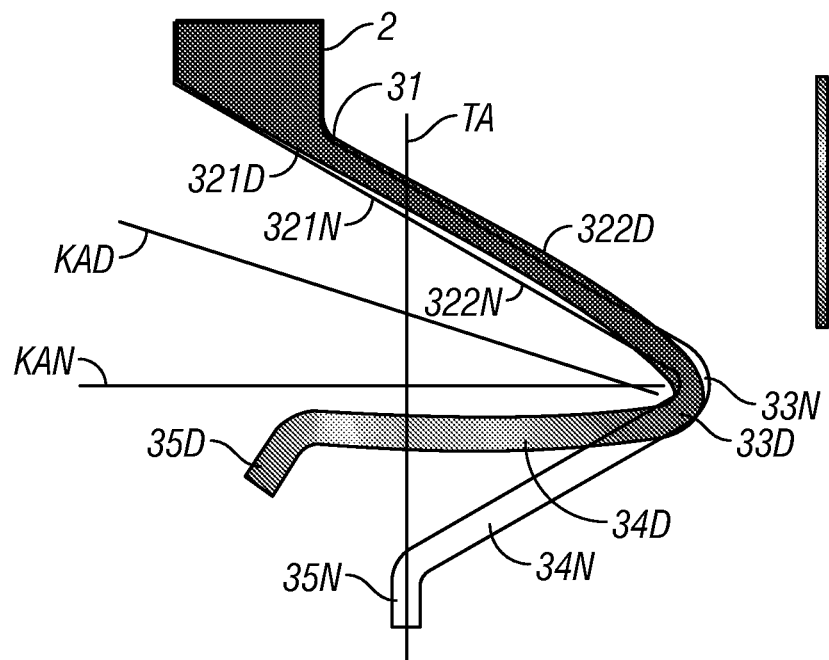


FIG. 14

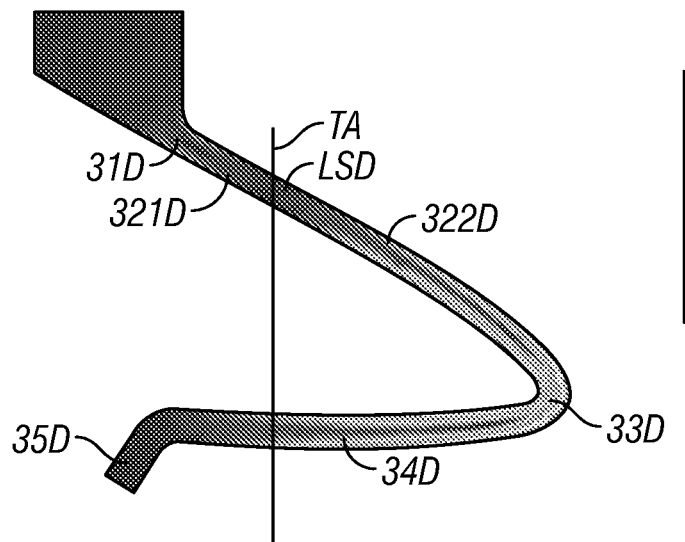


FIG. 15

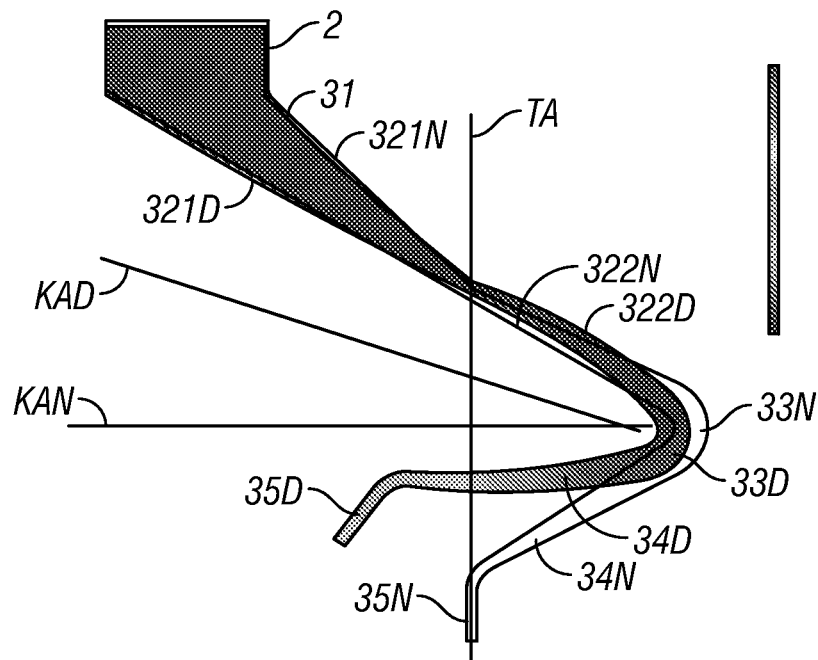


FIG. 16

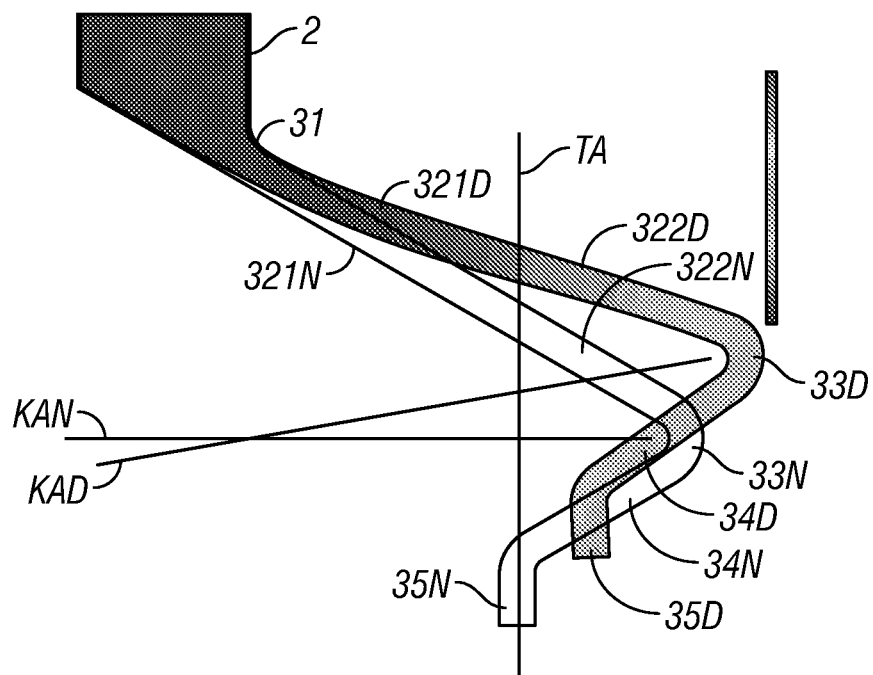


FIG. 17

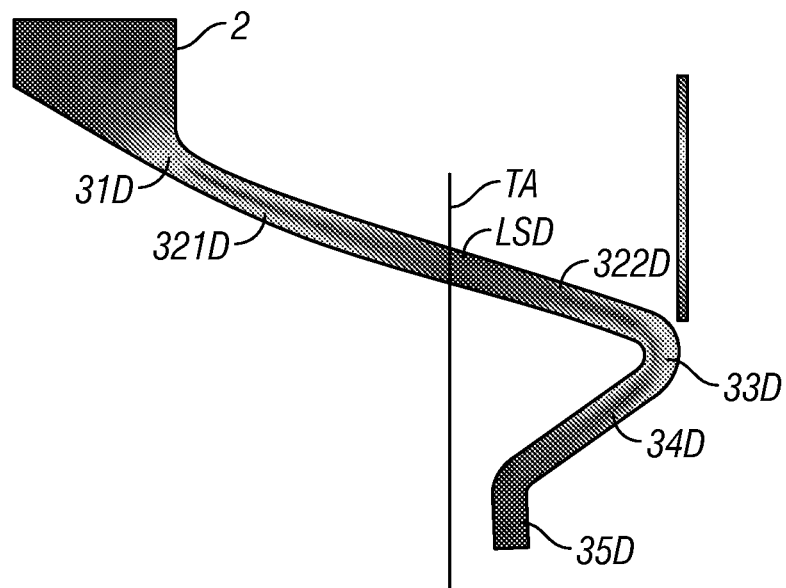


FIG. 18

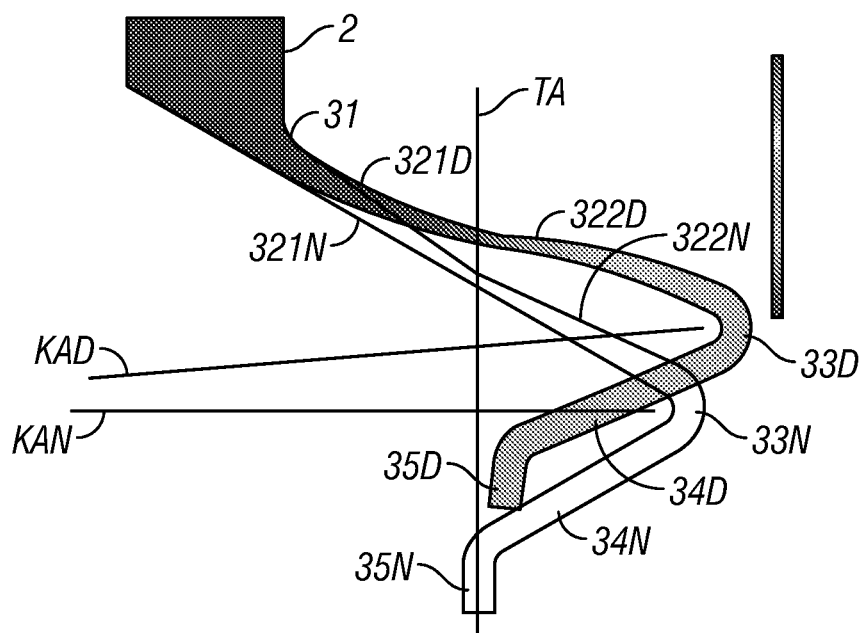
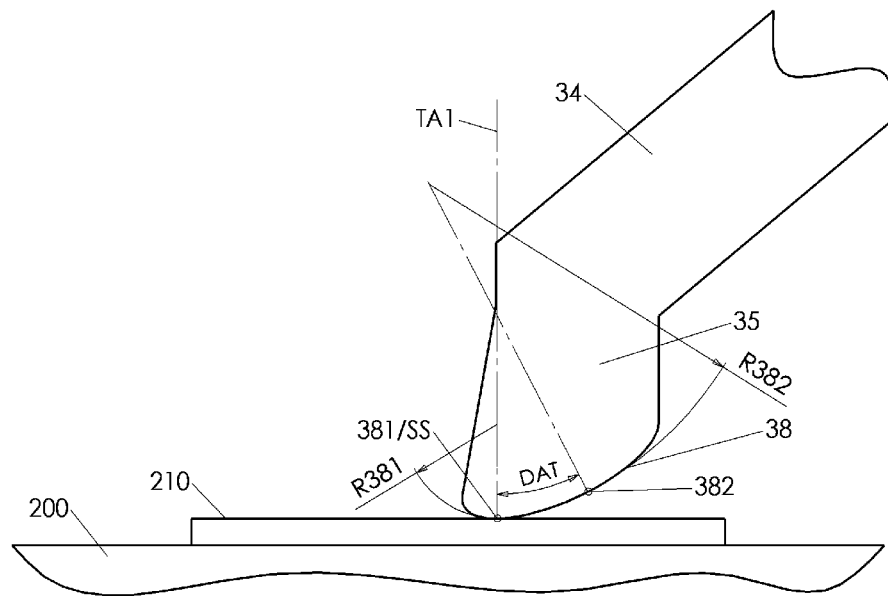


FIG. 19

**Fig. 20**

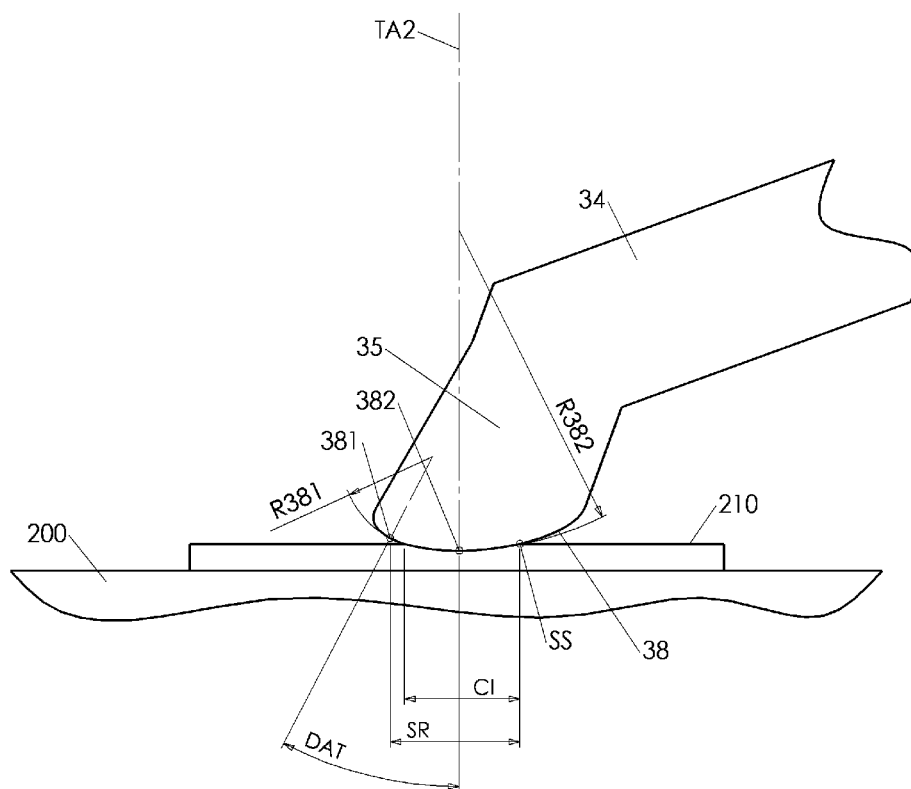


Fig. 21

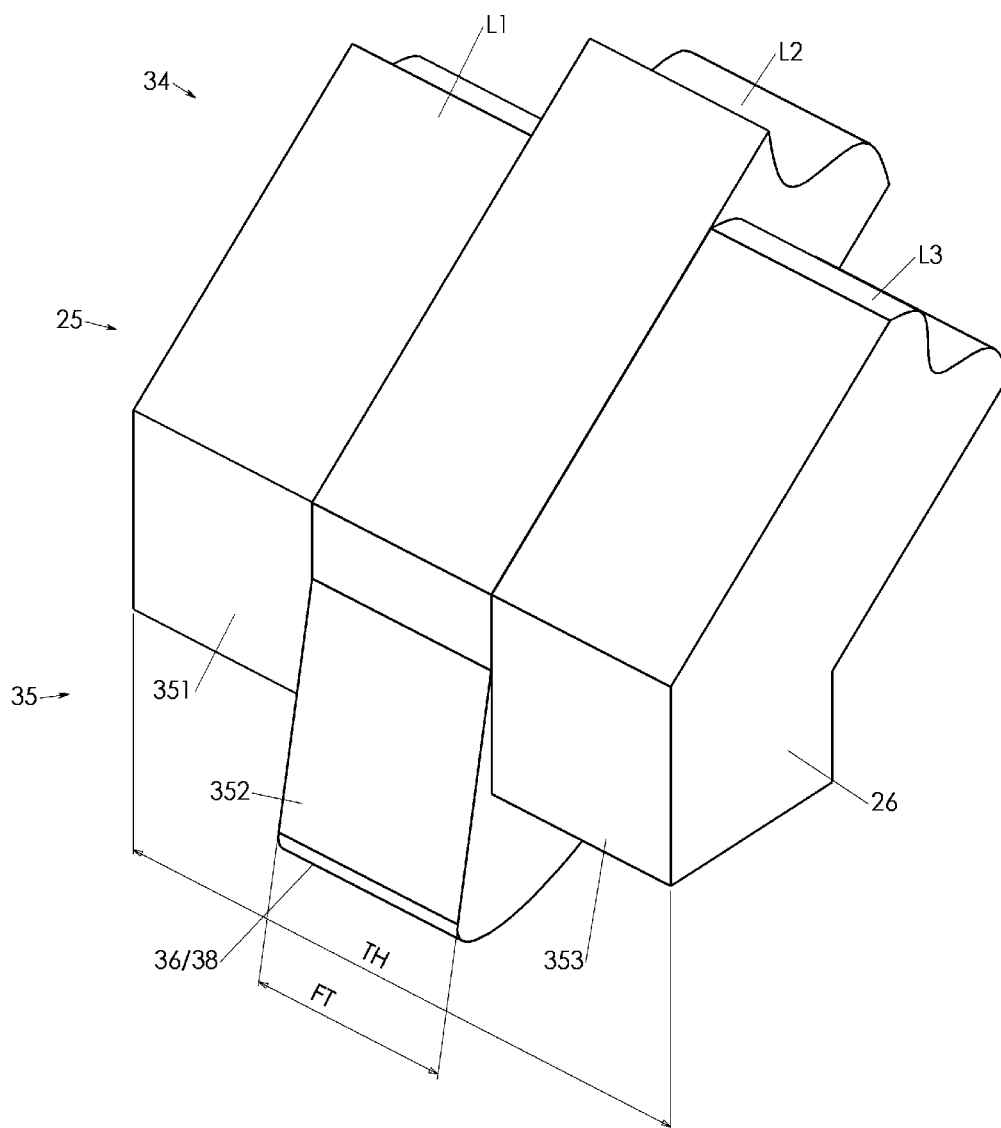
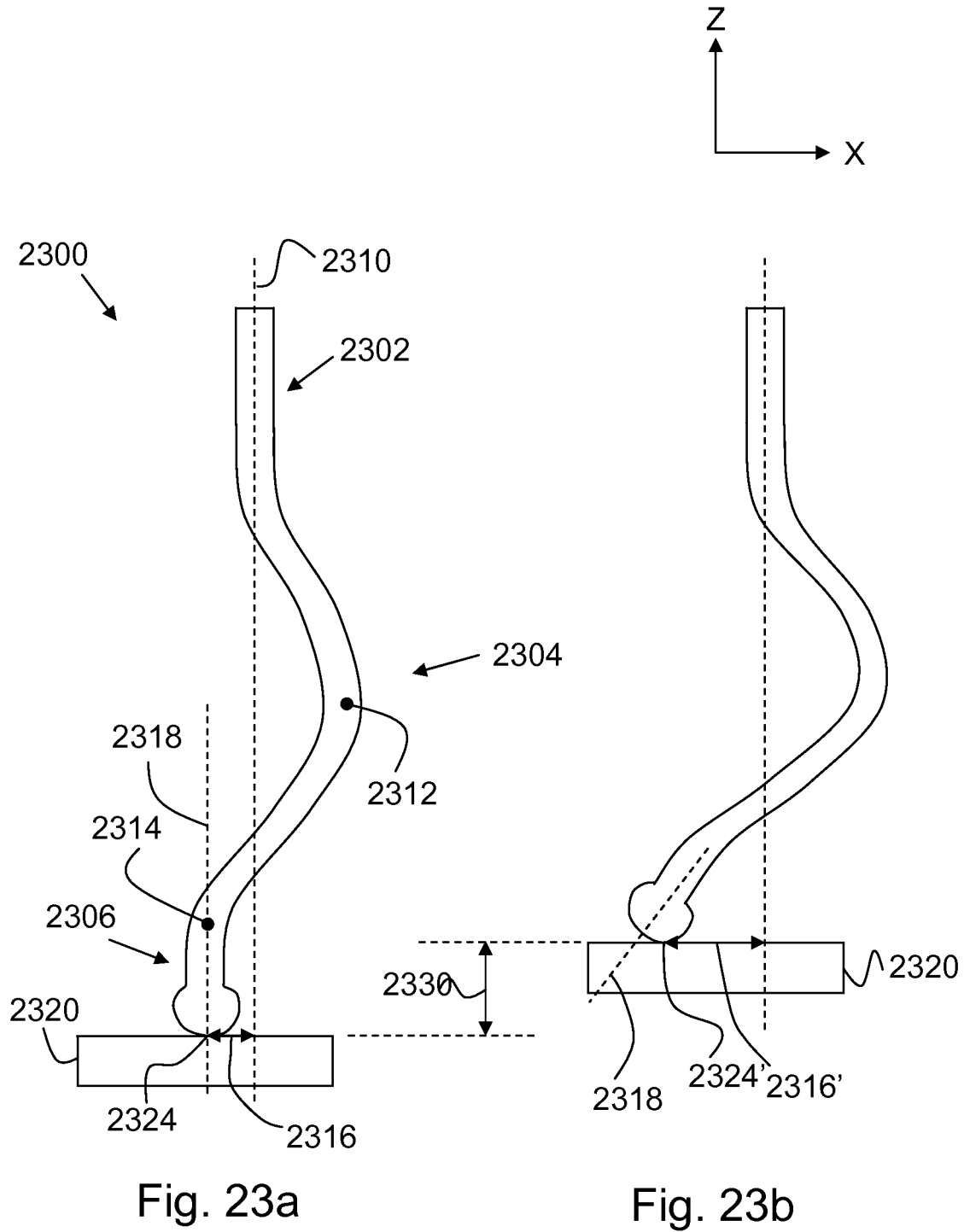


Fig. 22



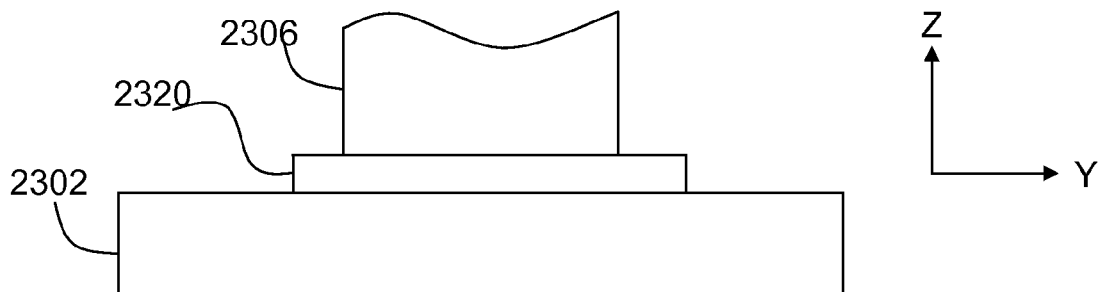


Fig. 24

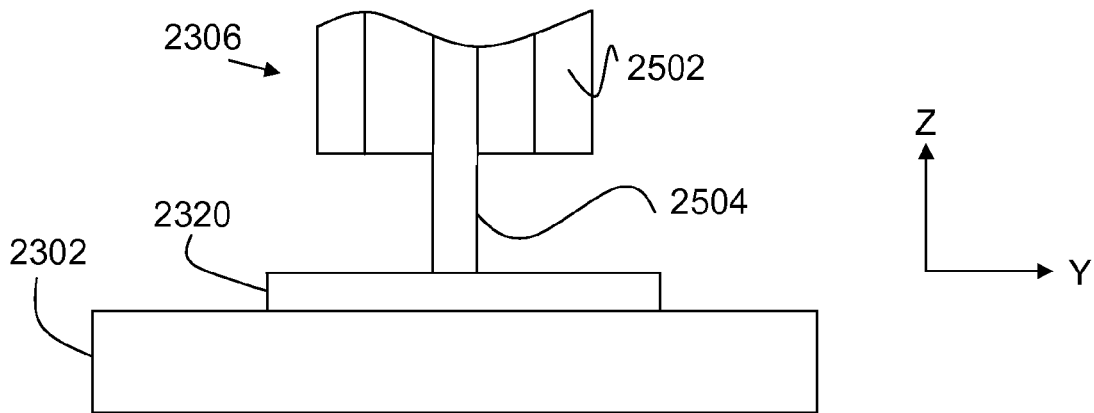


Fig. 25

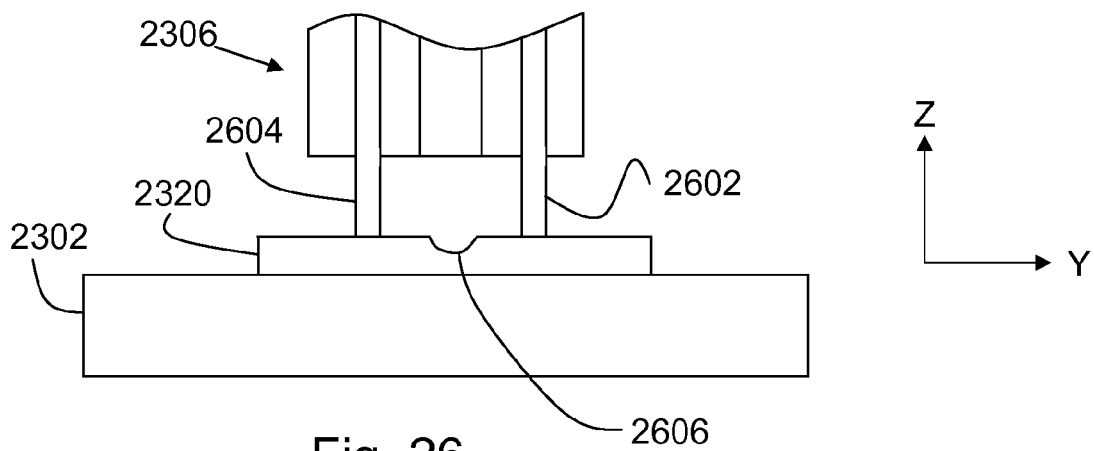


Fig. 26

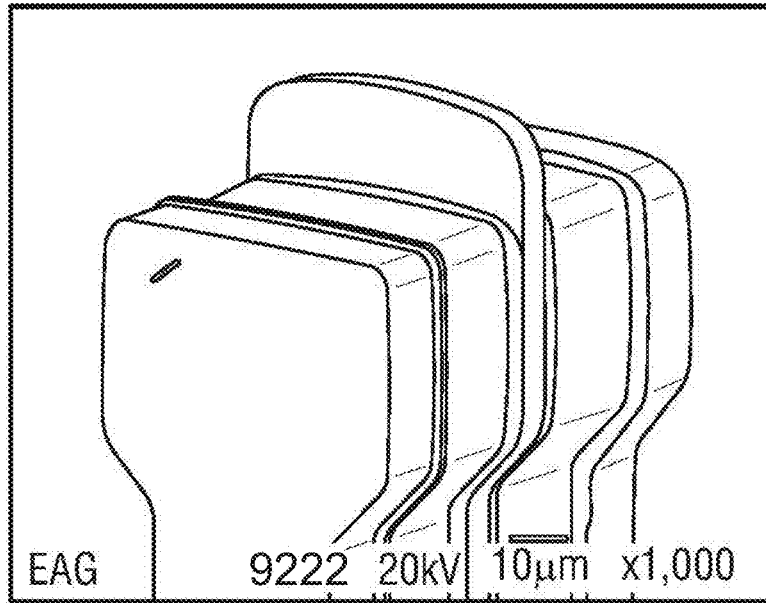


FIG. 27A

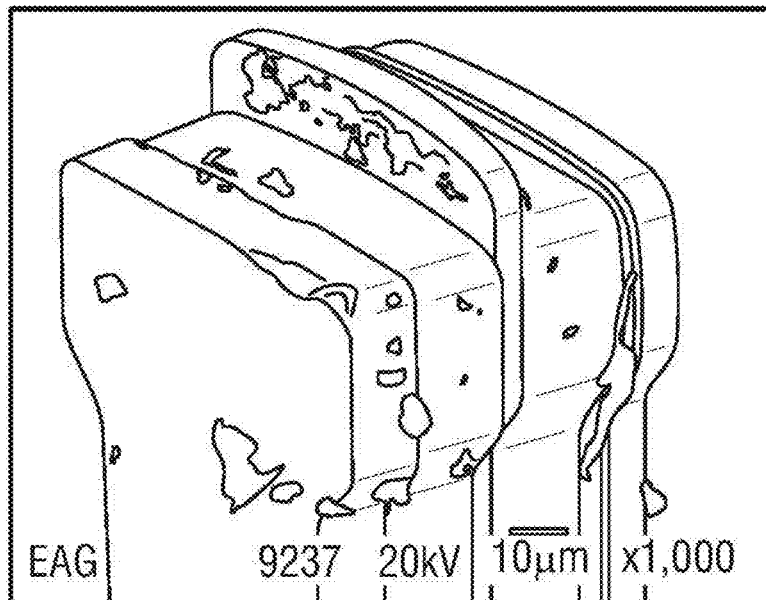


FIG. 27B

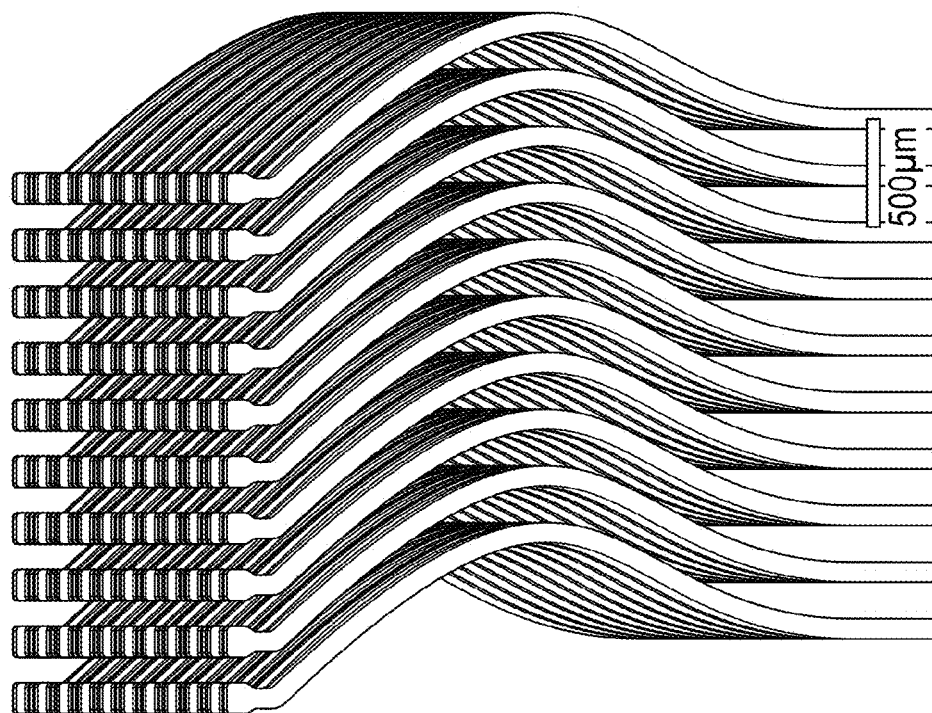


FIG. 28A

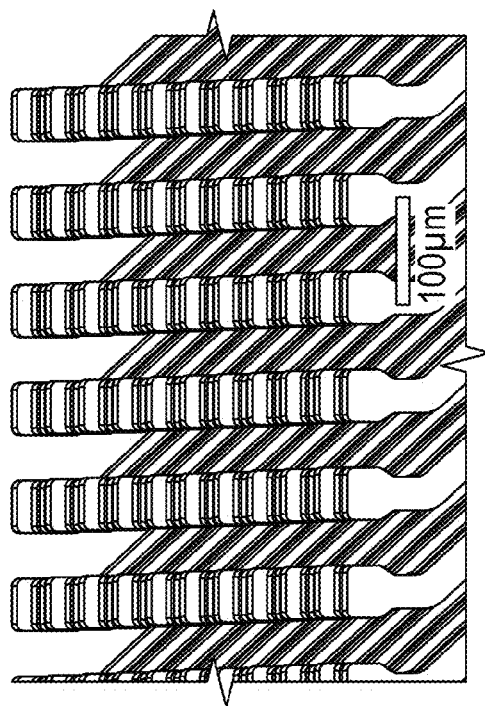


FIG. 28B

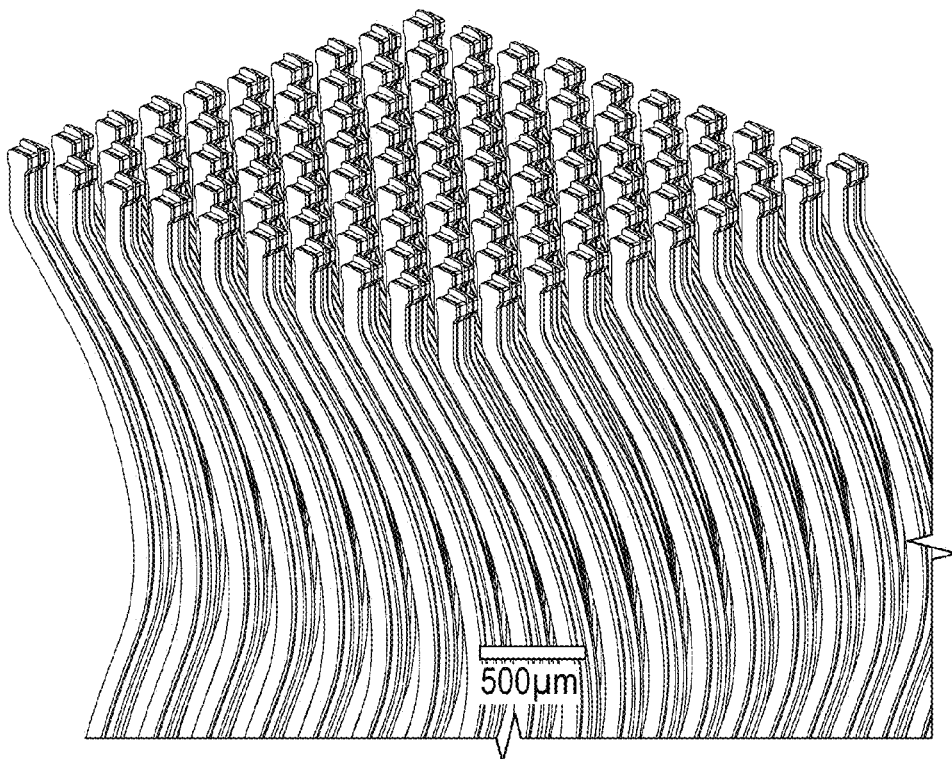


FIG. 28C

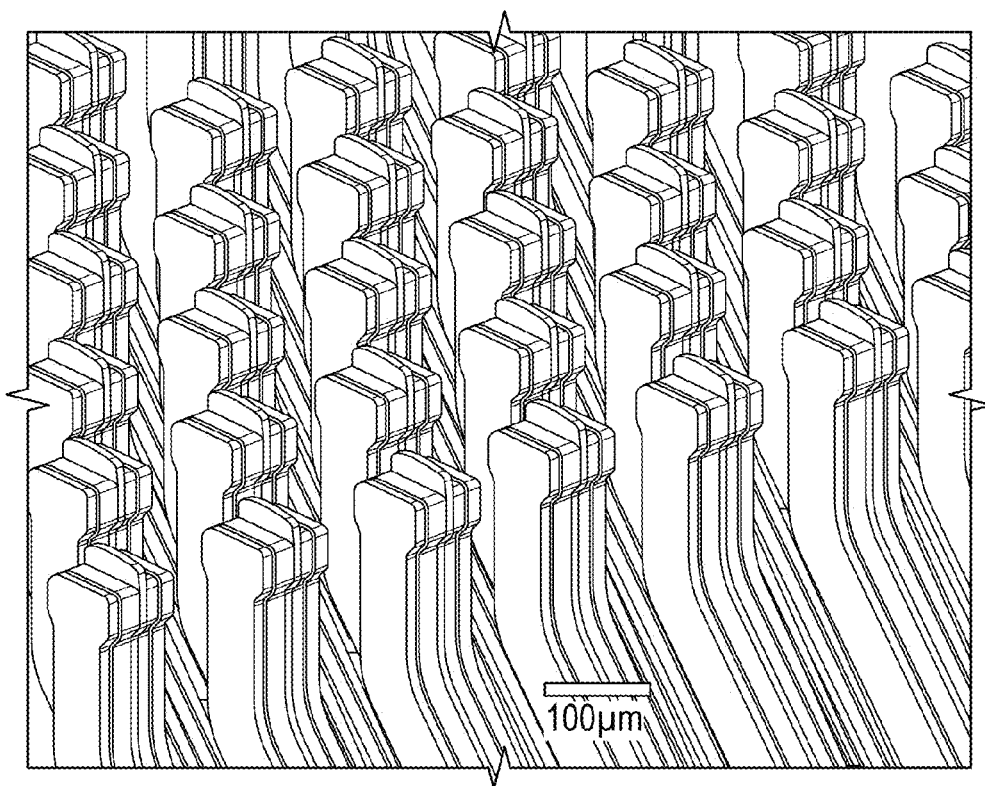


FIG. 28D

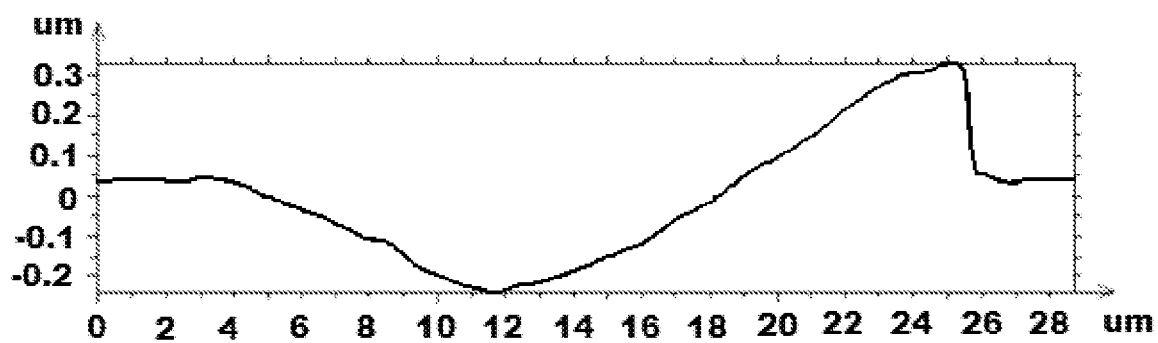


Fig. 29

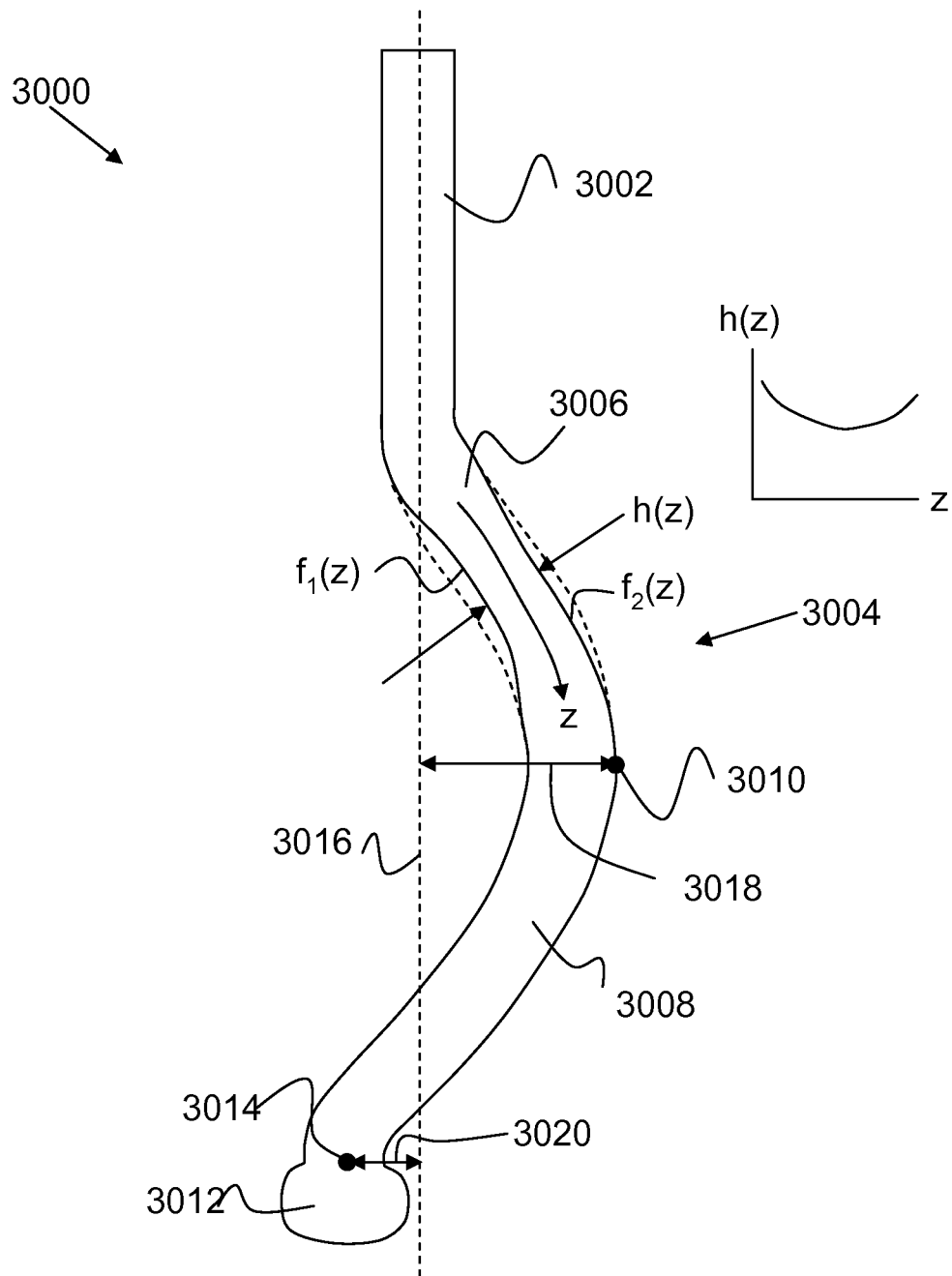


Fig. 30

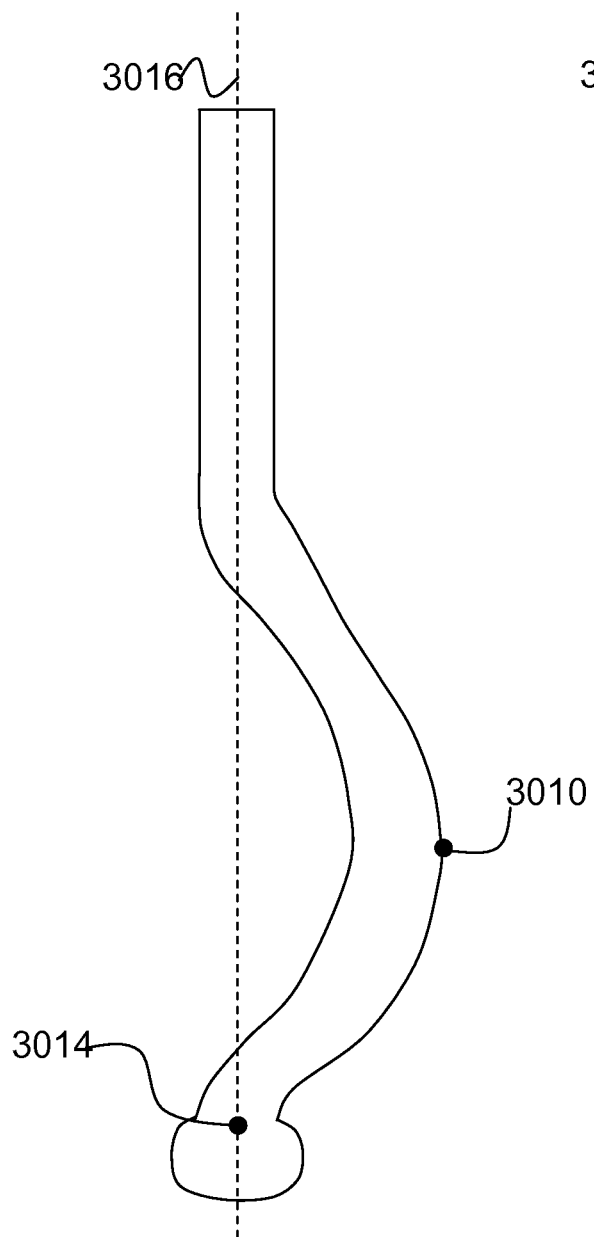


Fig. 31

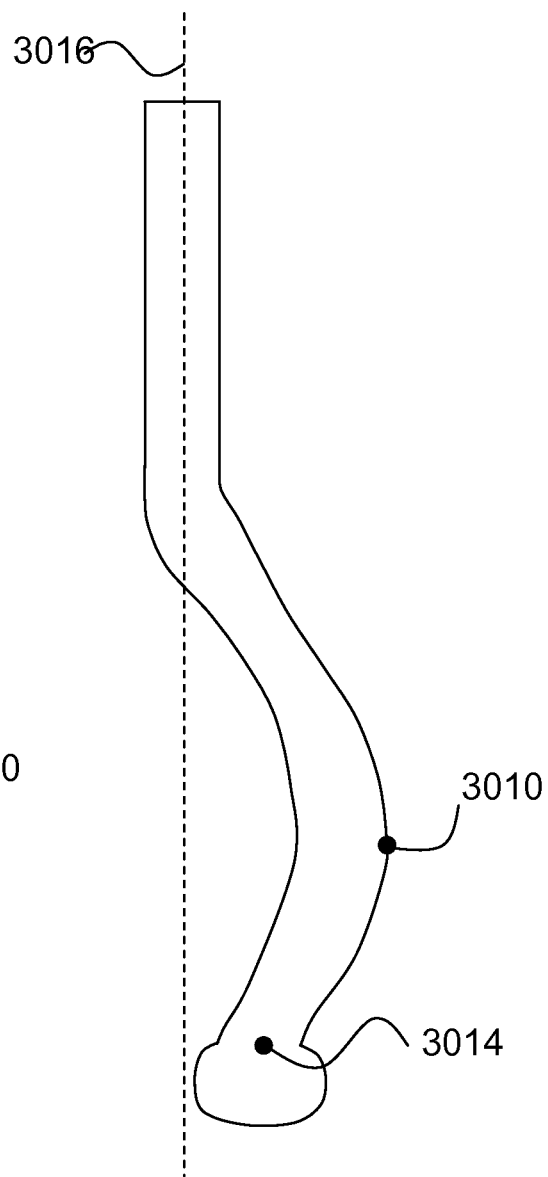


Fig. 32

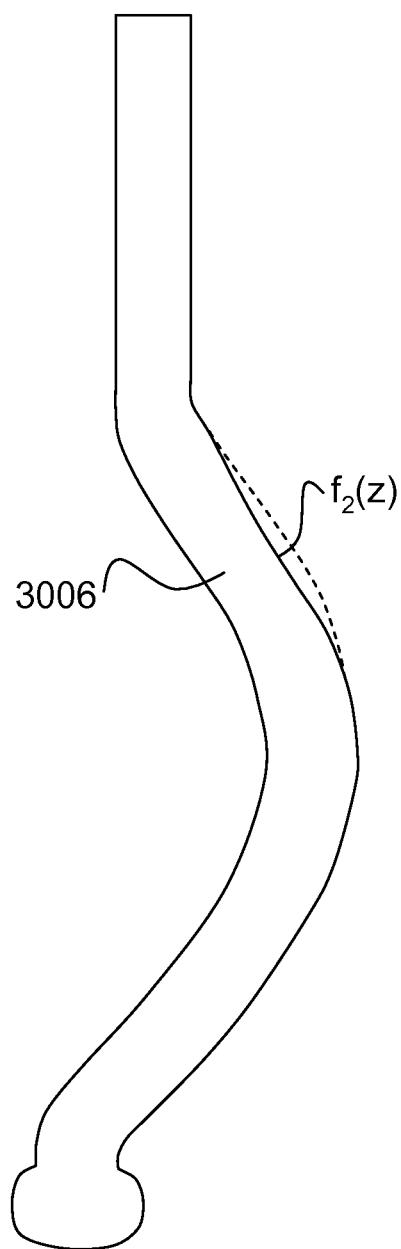


Fig. 33

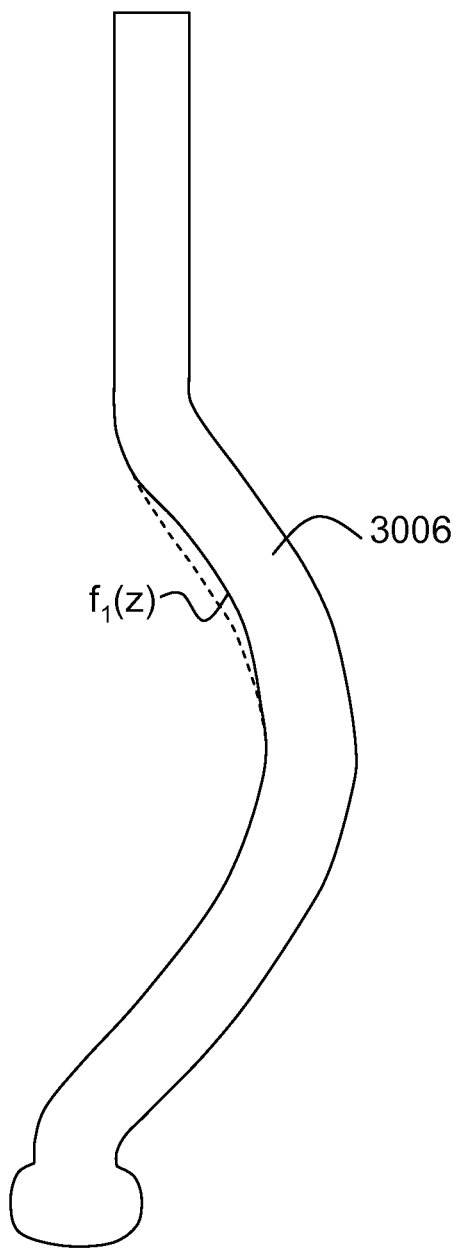


Fig. 34

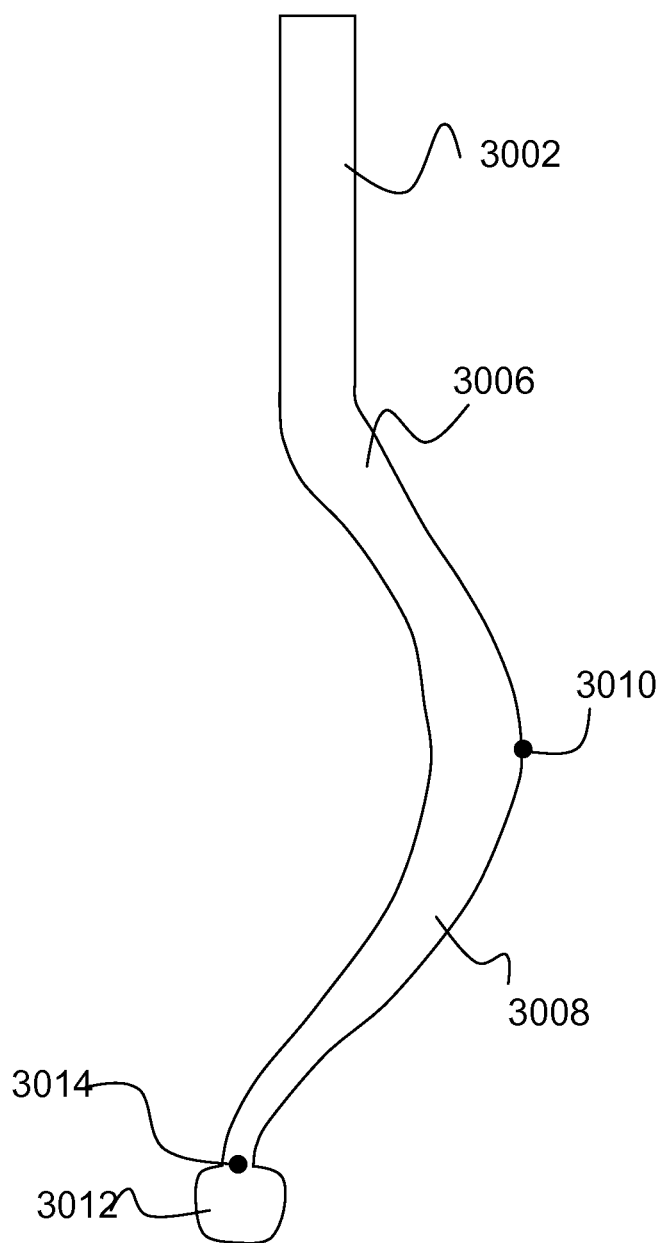


Fig. 35

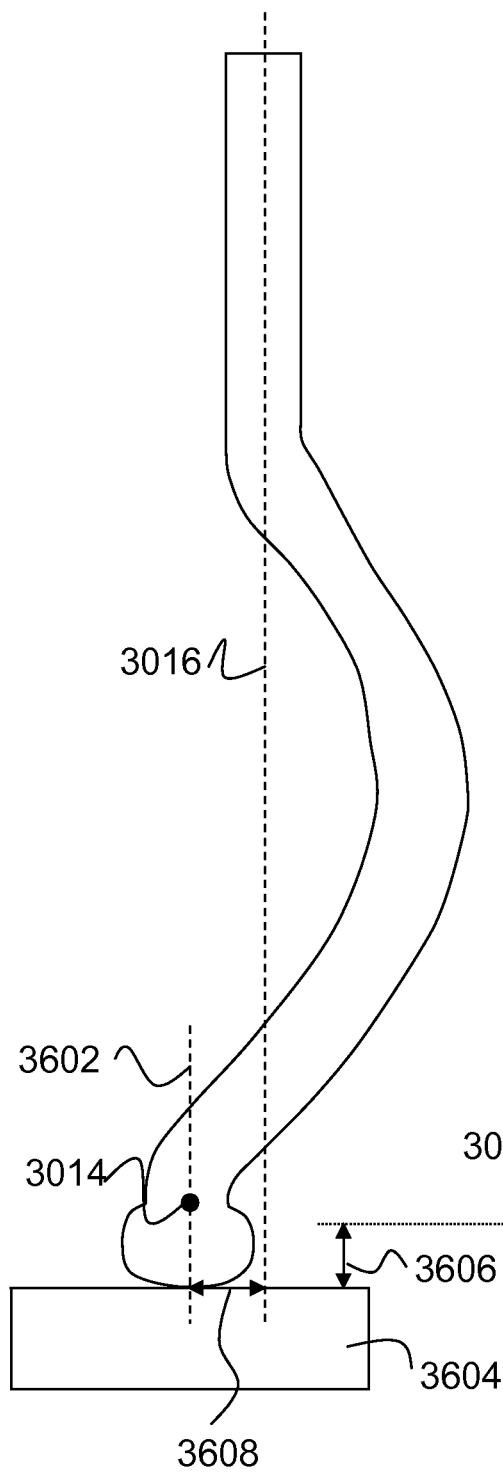


Fig. 36a

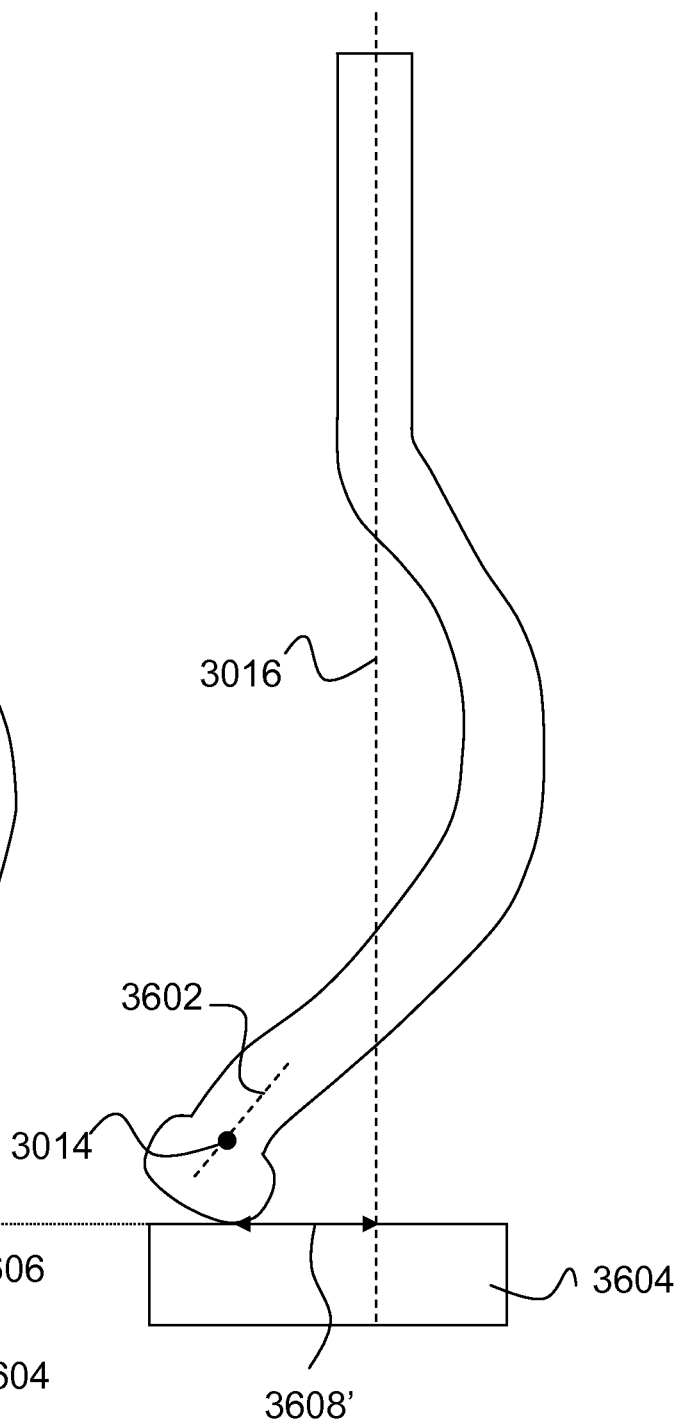


Fig. 36b

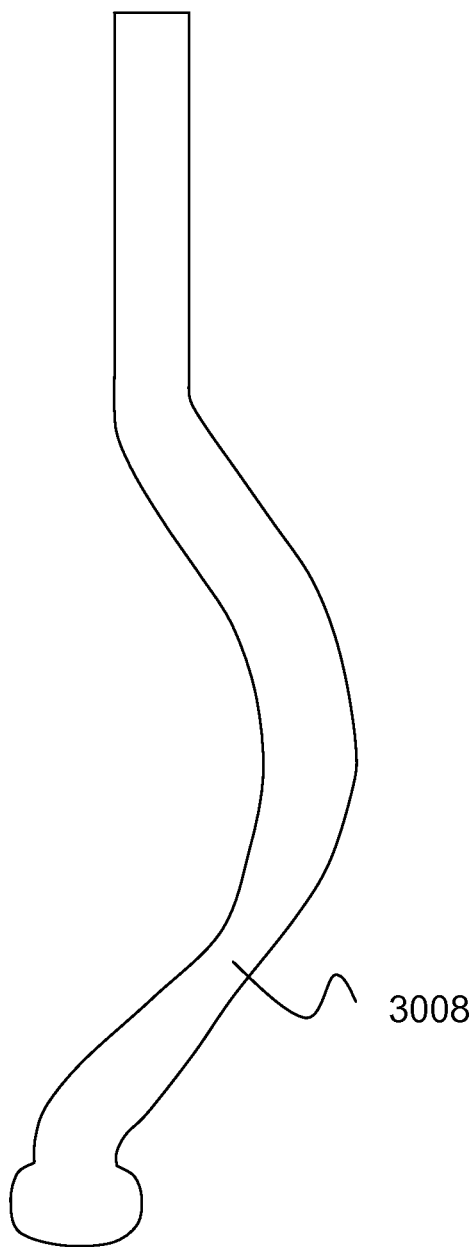


Fig. 37

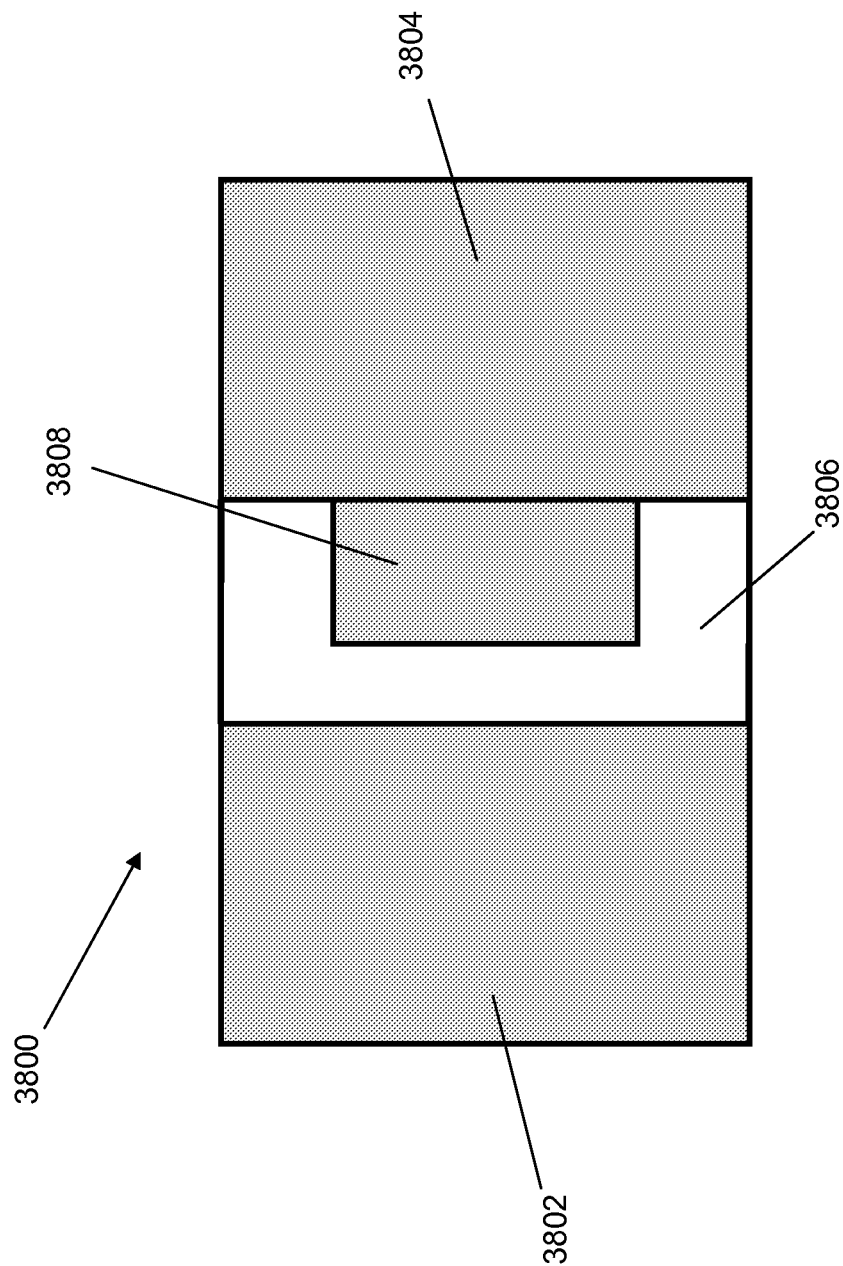


FIG. 38

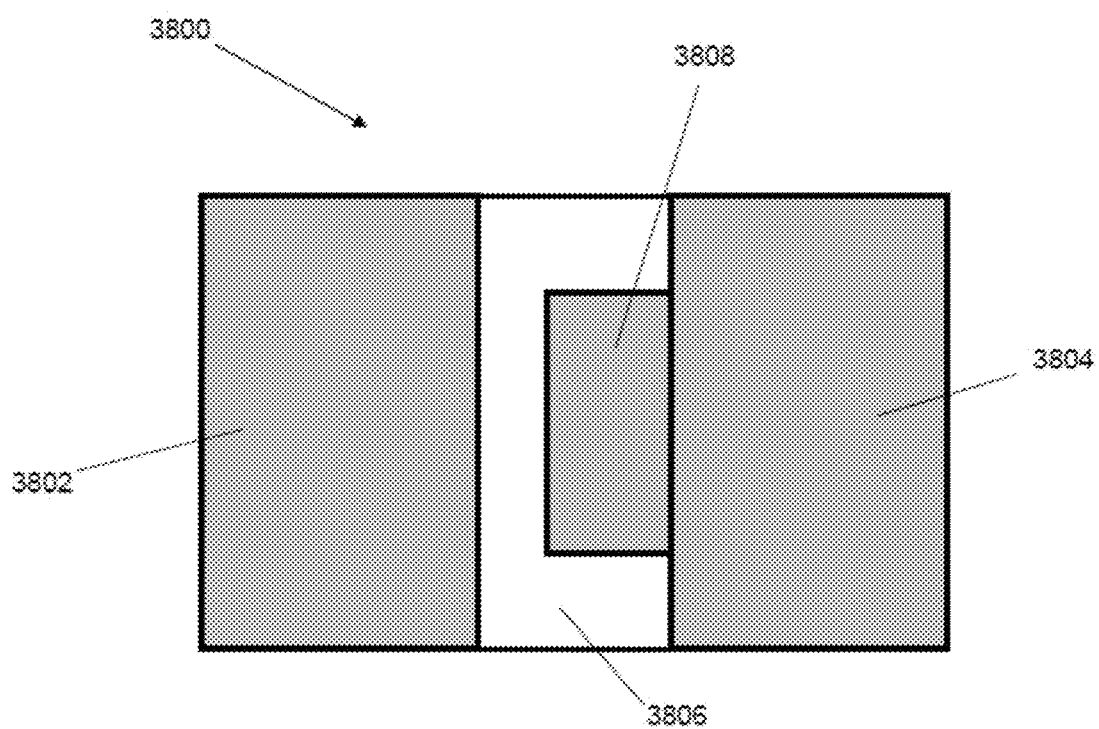


FIG. 39

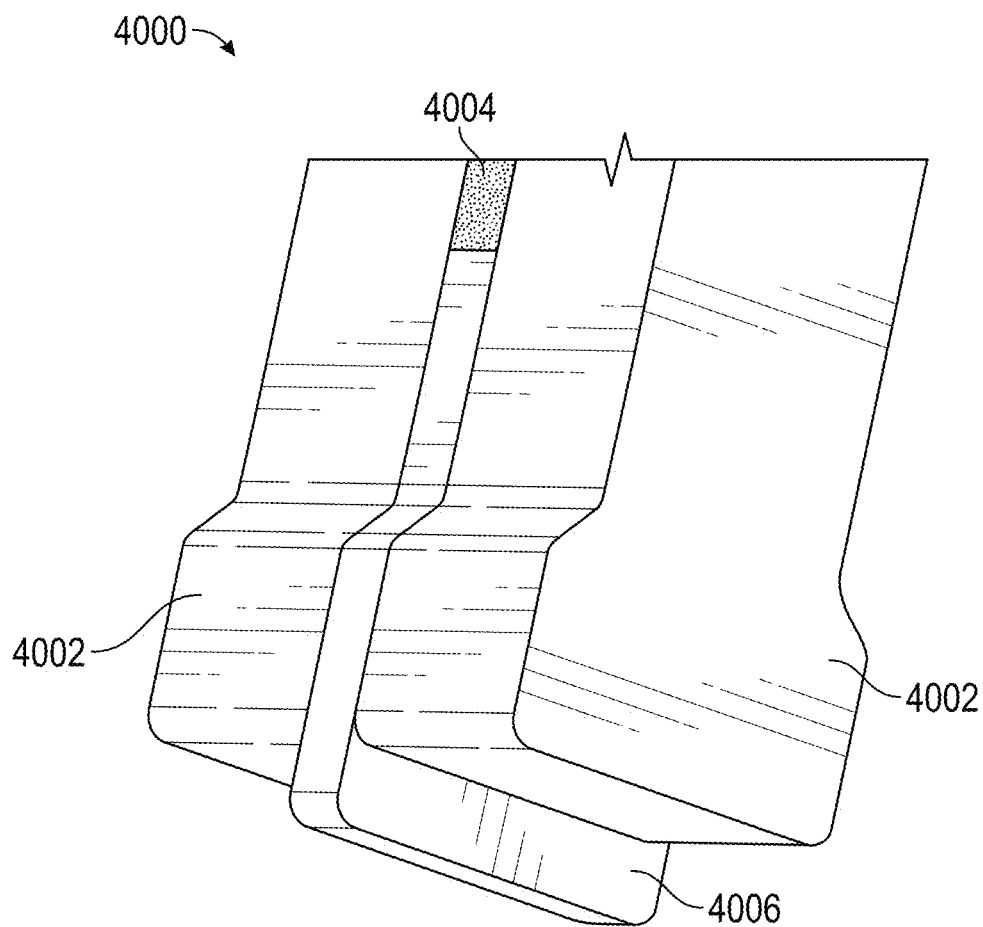


FIG. 40

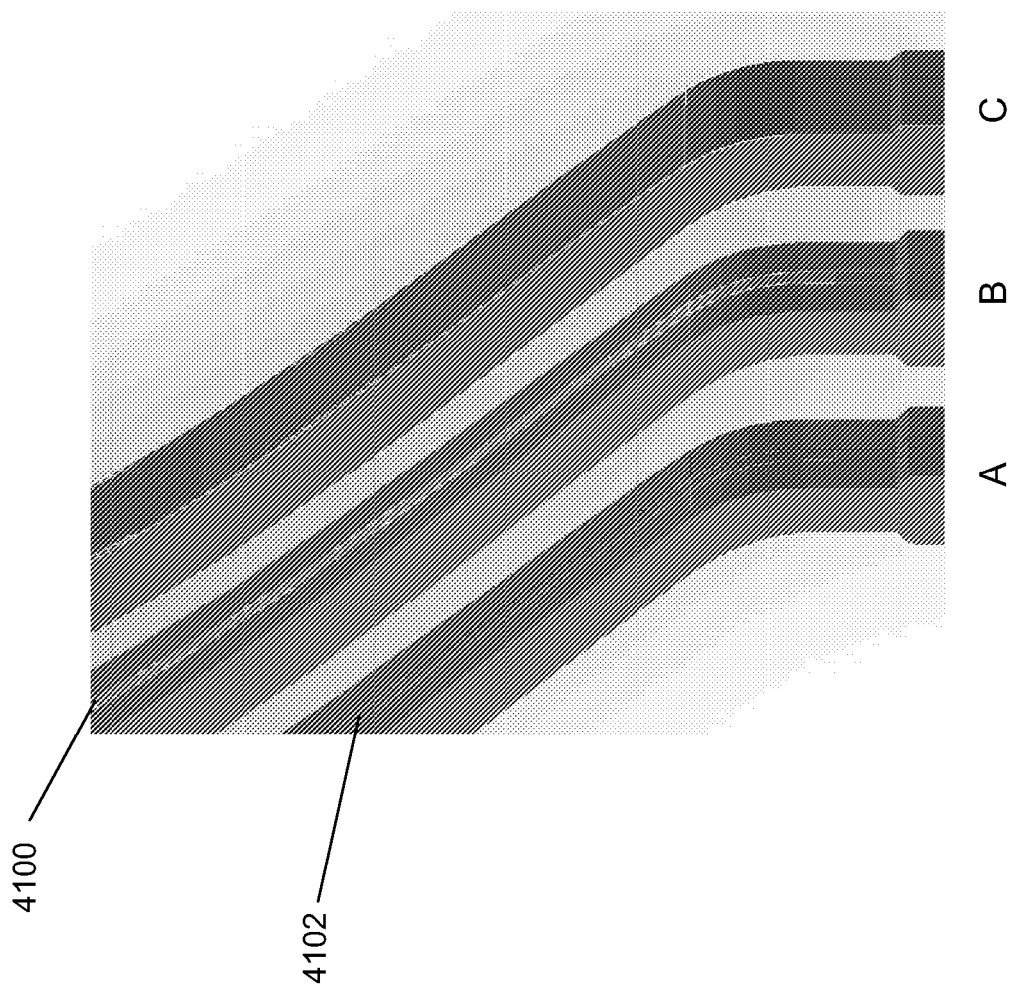


FIG. 41

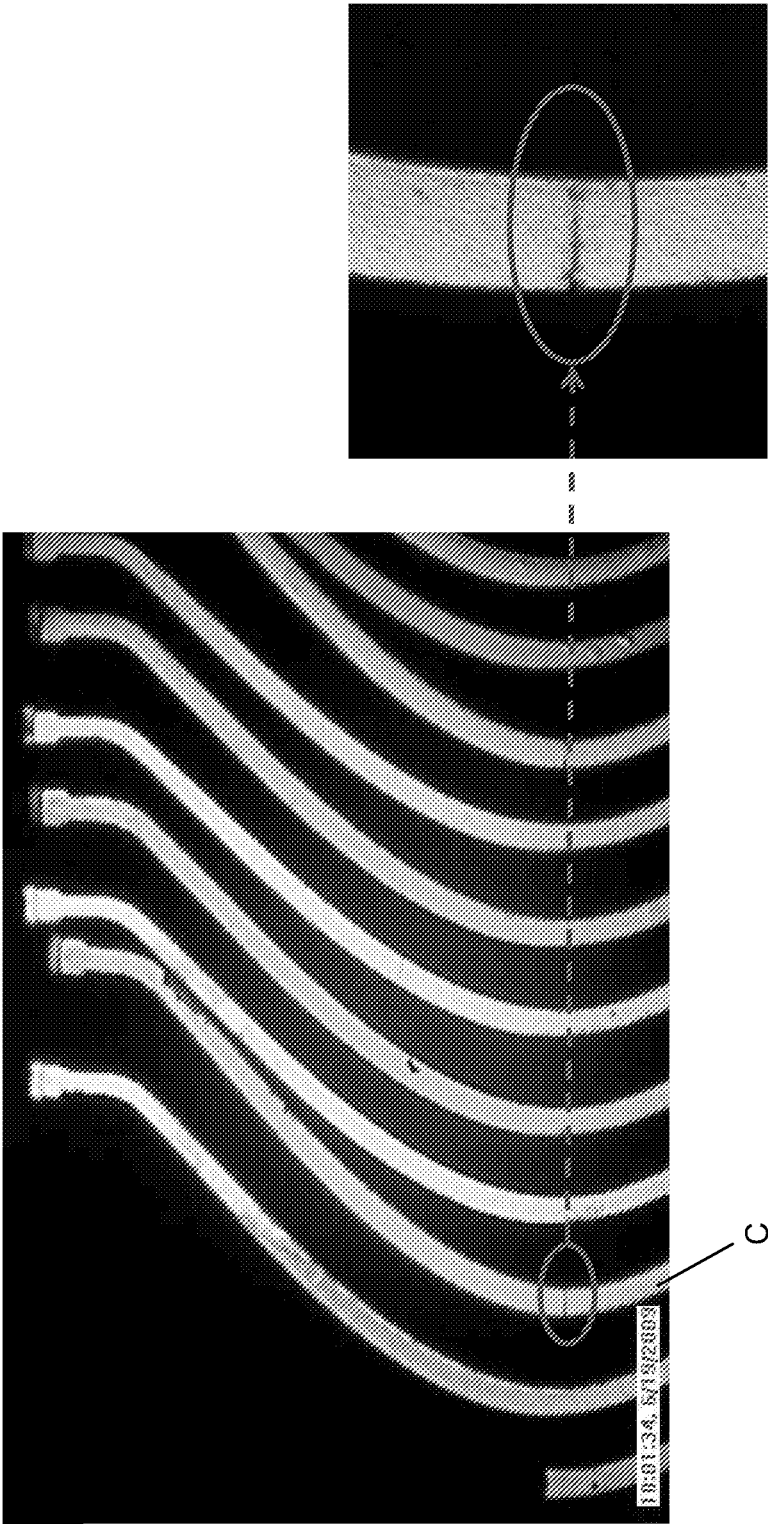


FIG. 42

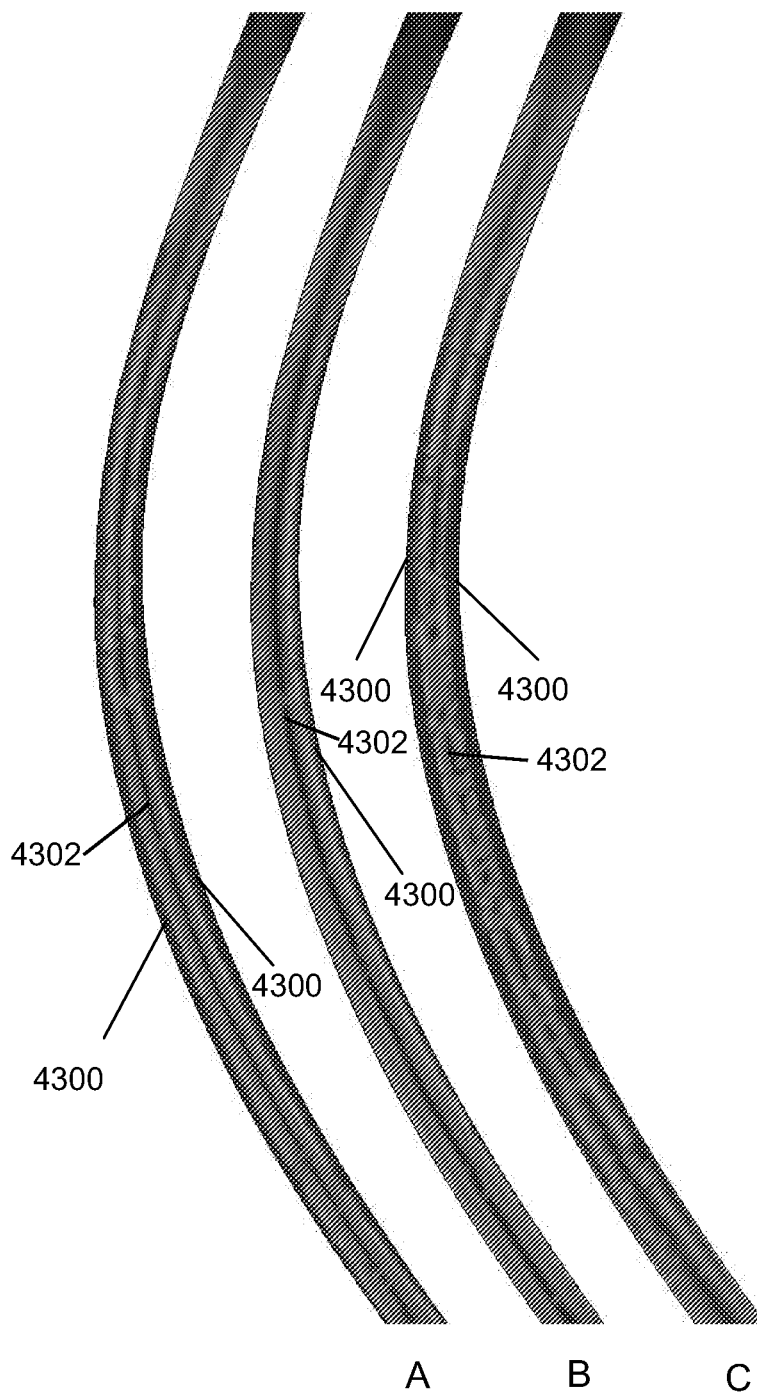


FIG. 43

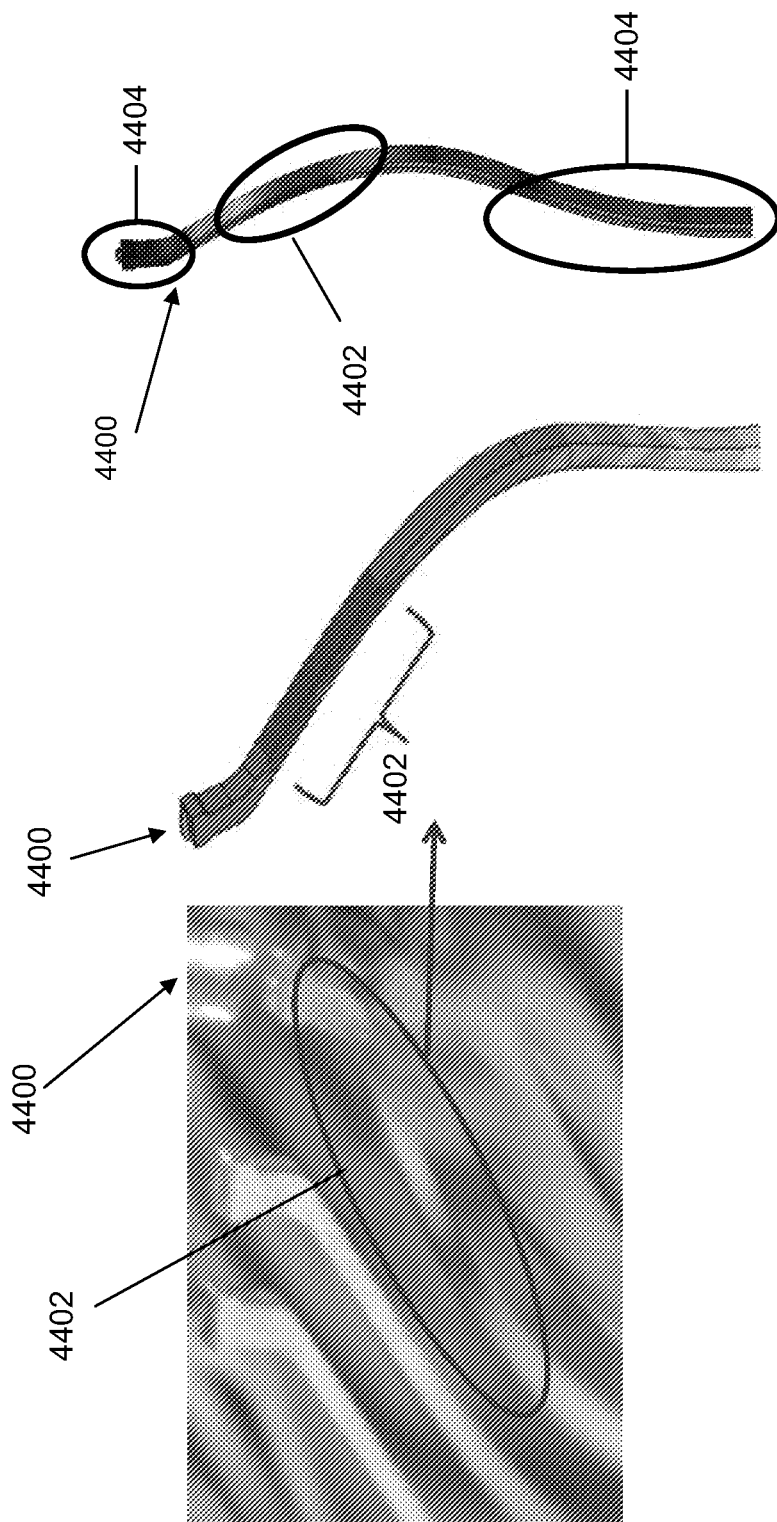


FIG. 44

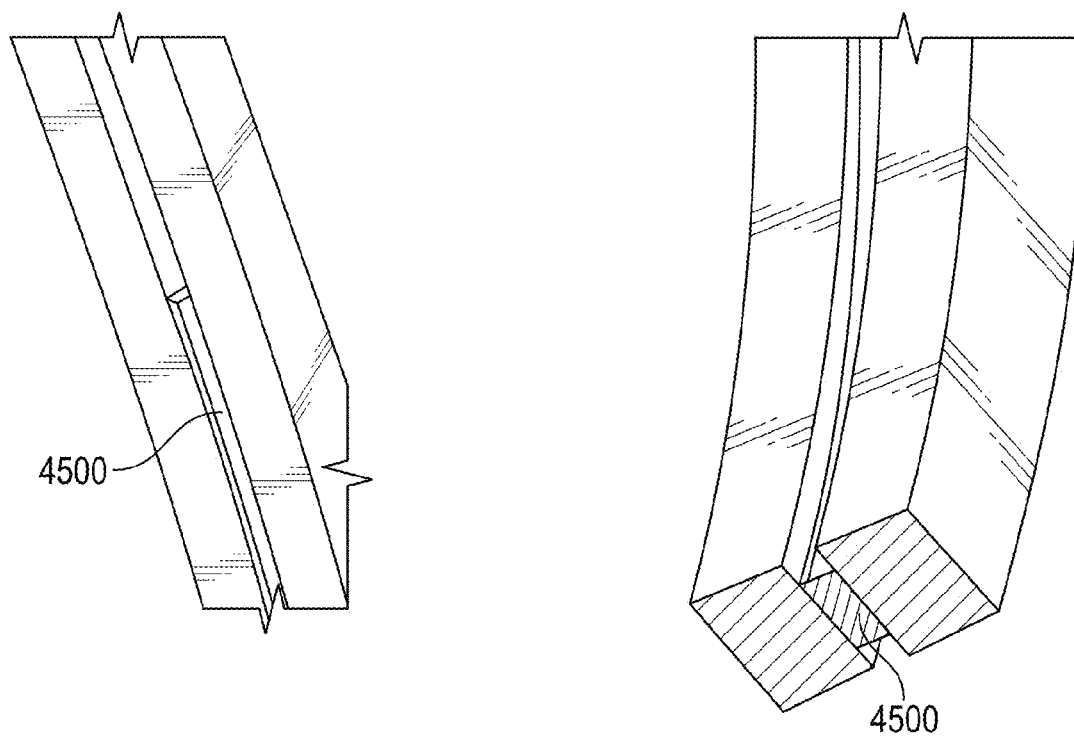


FIG. 45

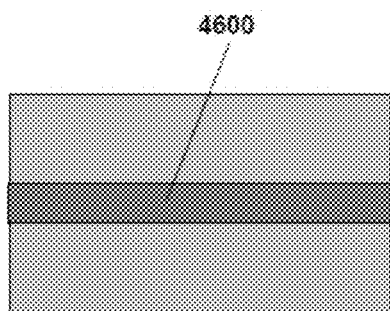


Fig. 46

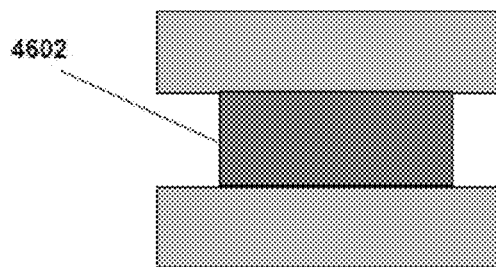


Fig. 47

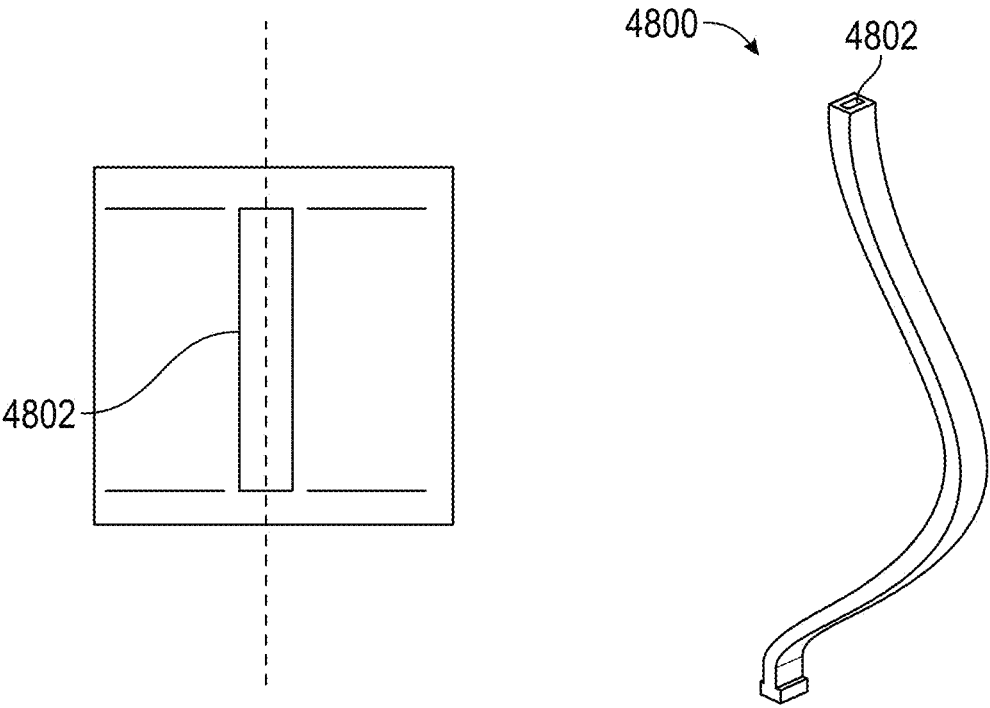


FIG. 48

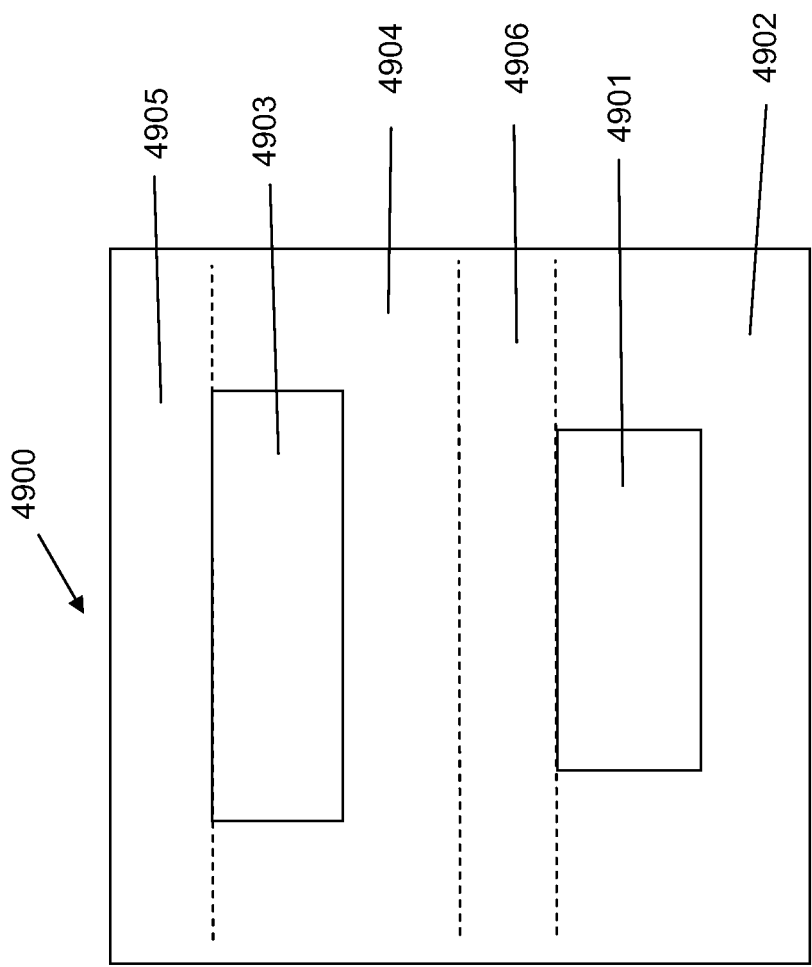


FIG. 49

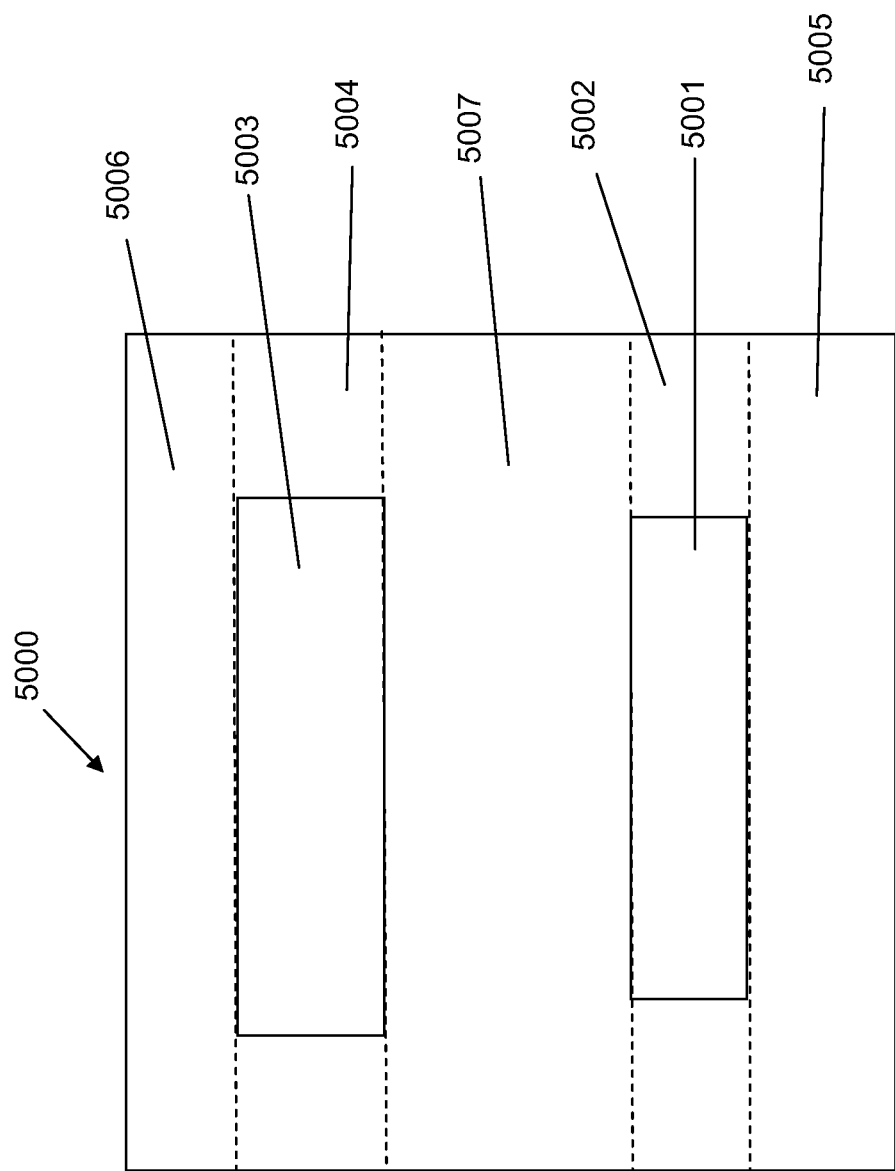


FIG. 50

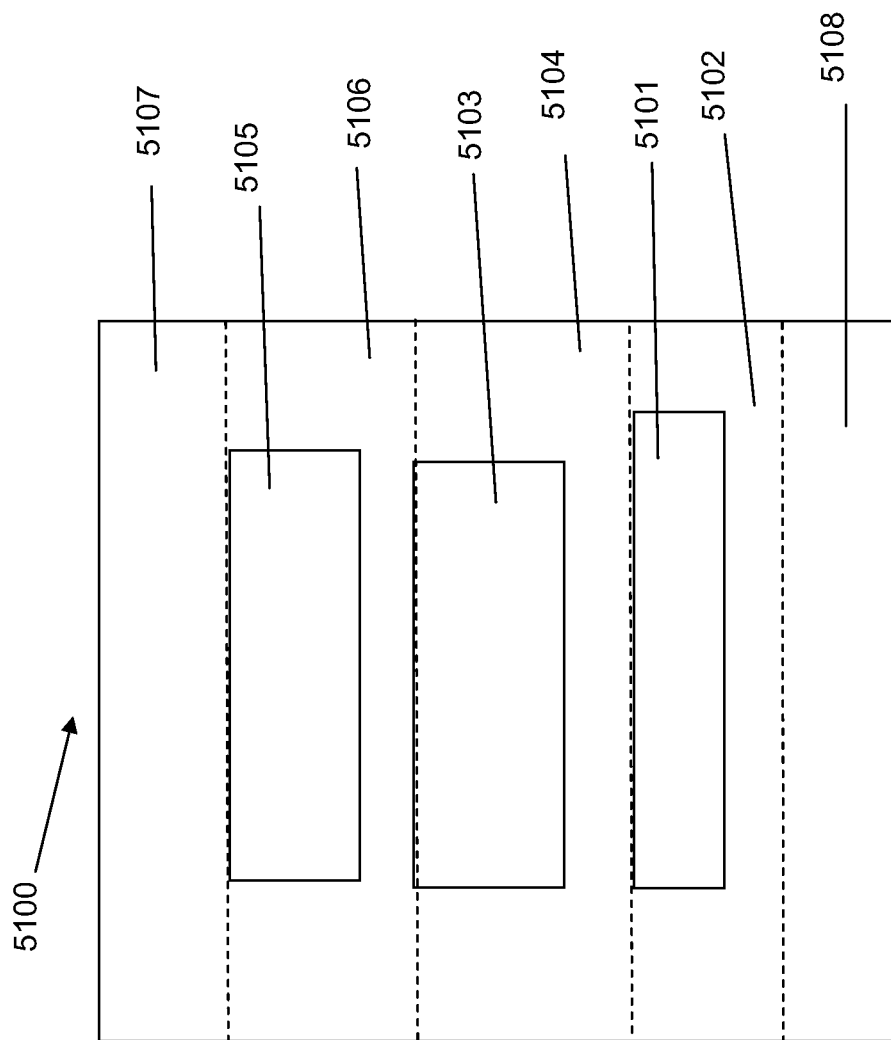


FIG. 51

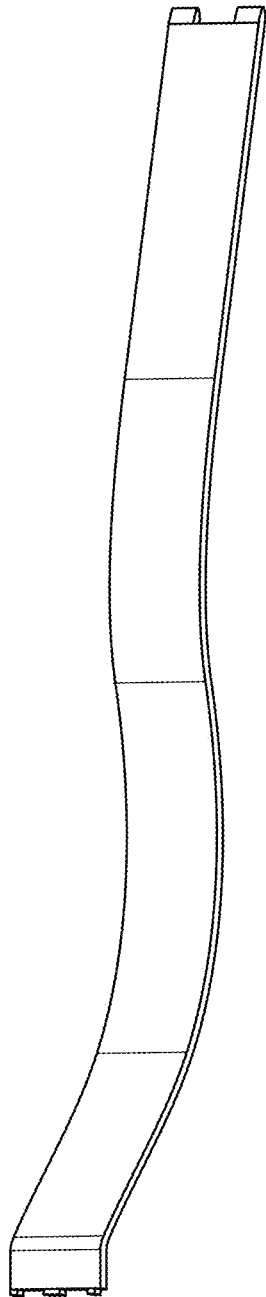


FIG. 52A

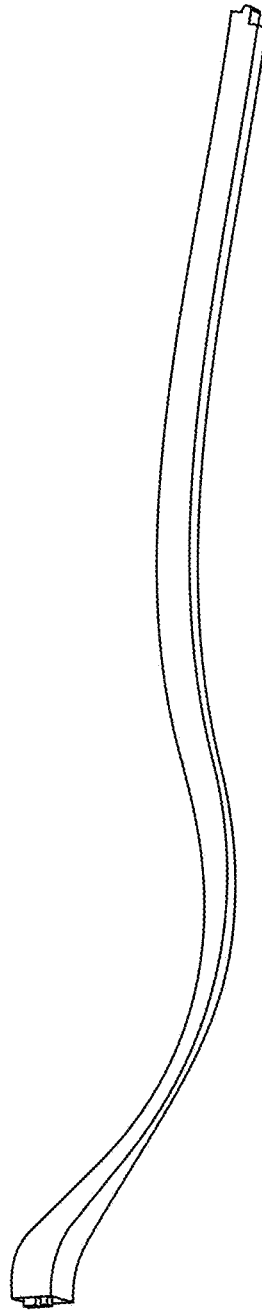


FIG. 52B

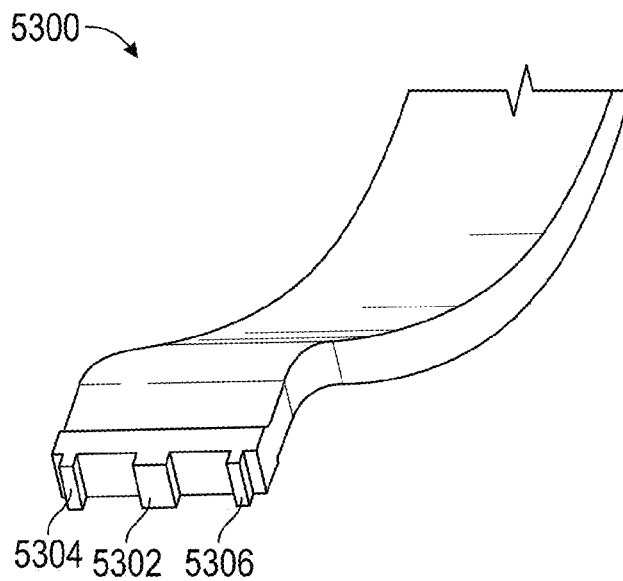


FIG. 53

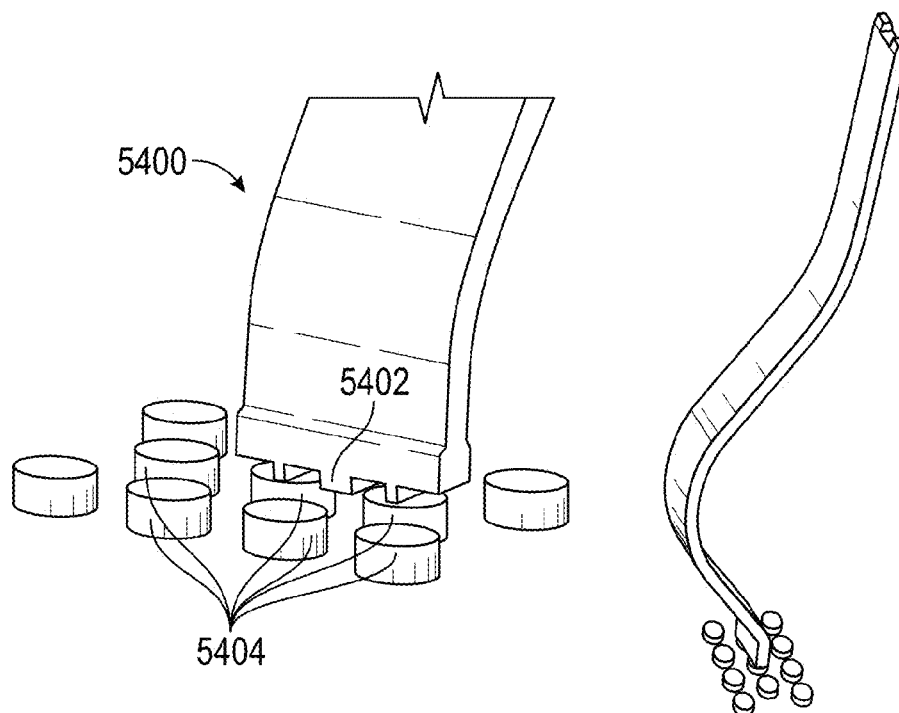


FIG. 54

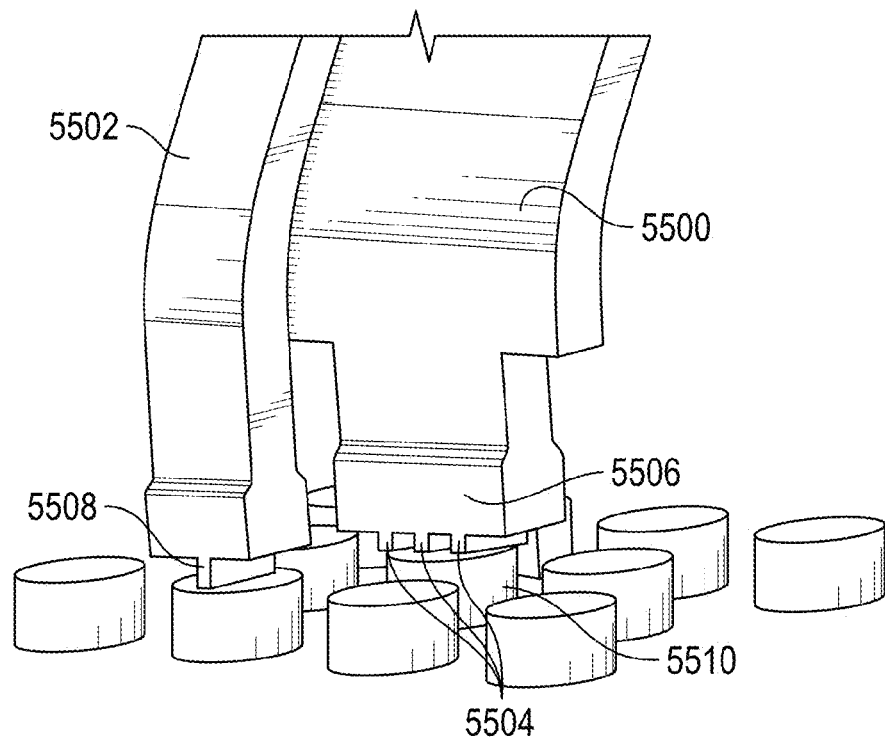


FIG. 55A

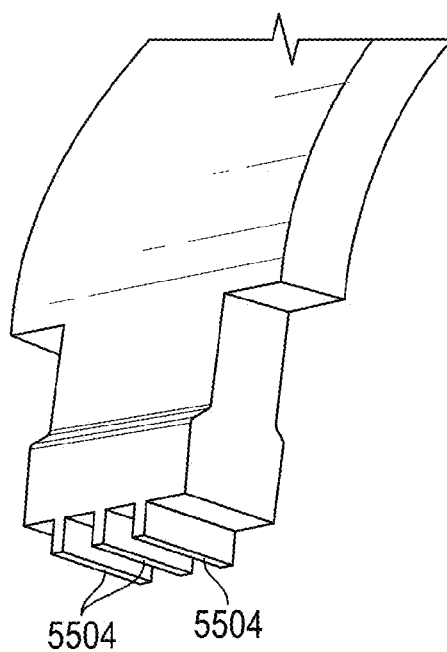


FIG. 55B

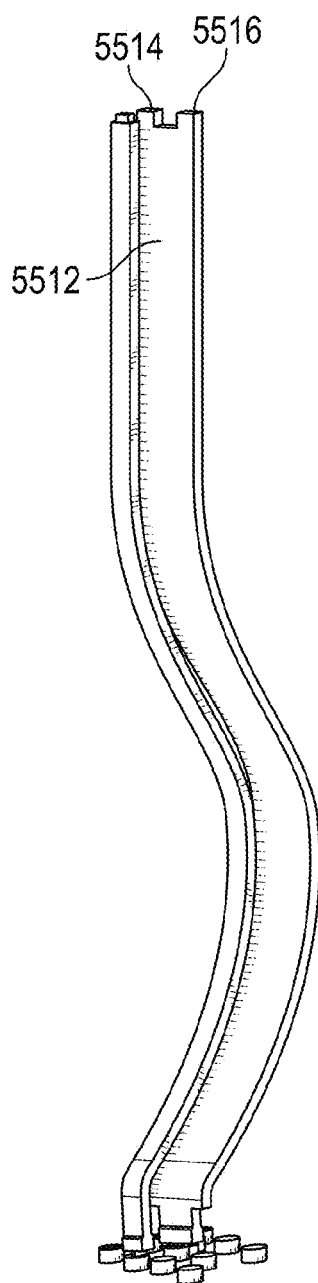


FIG. 55C

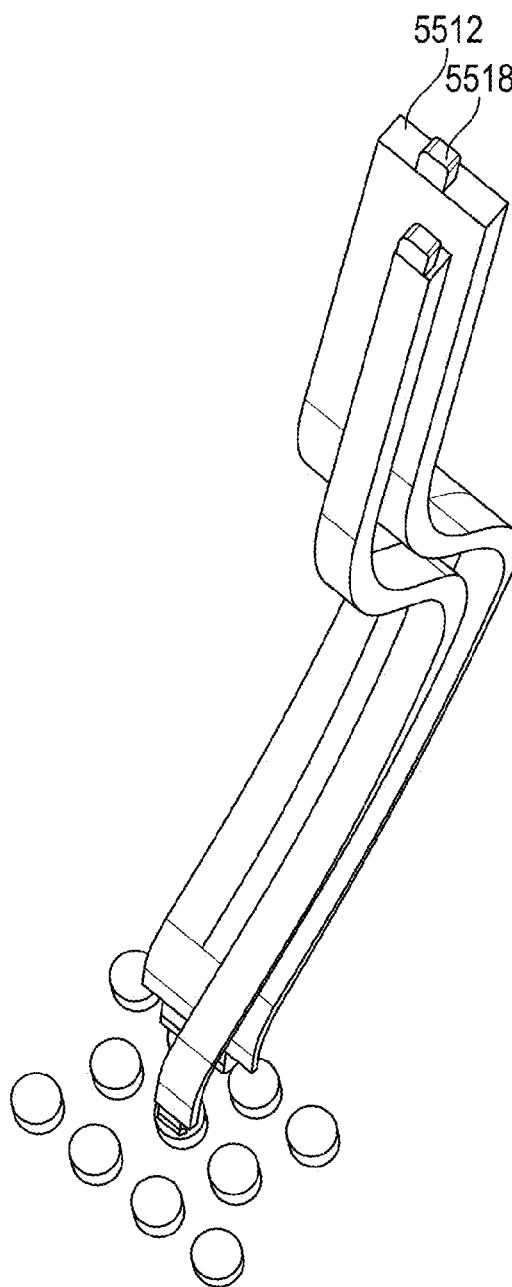


FIG. 55D

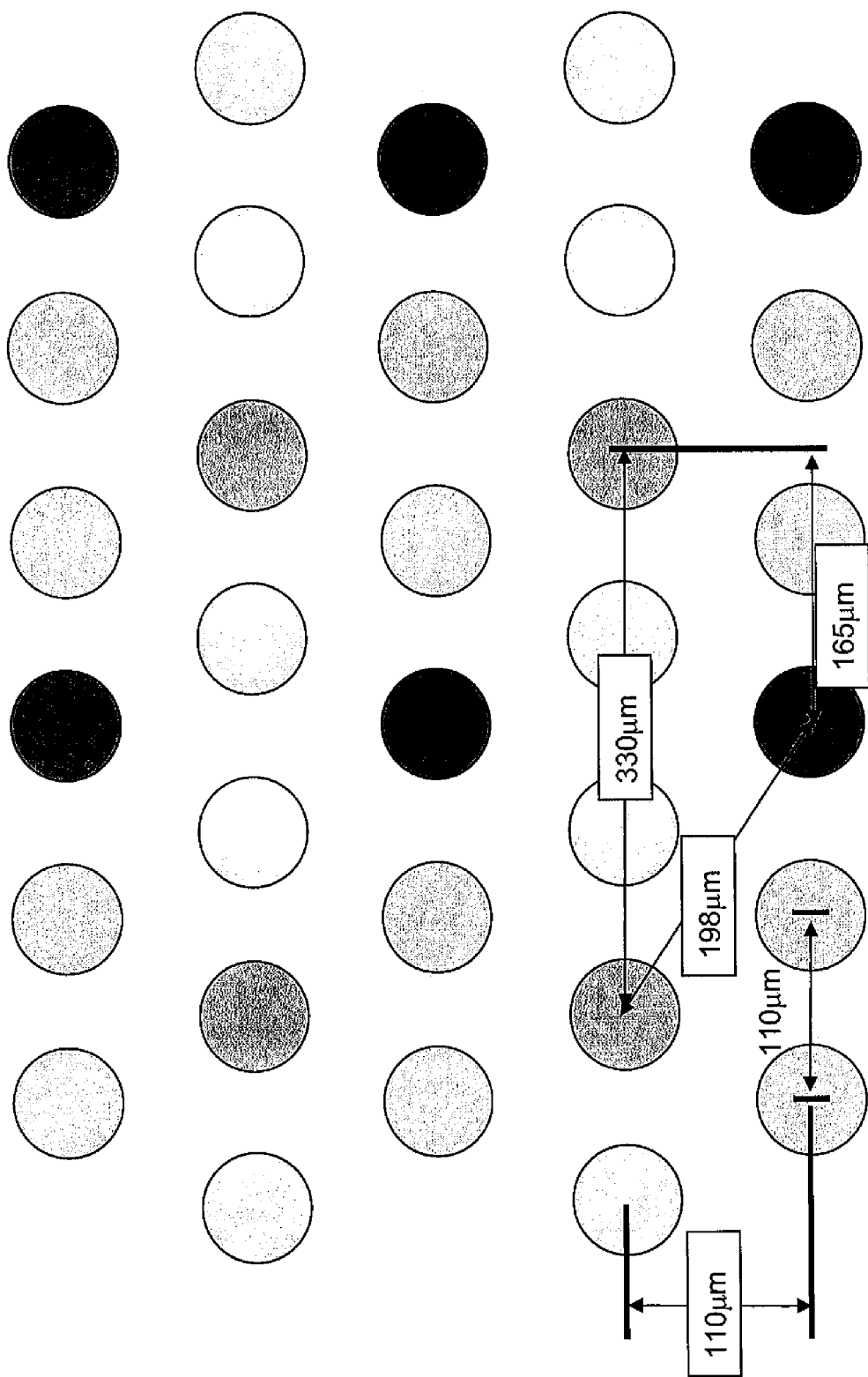


Fig. 56

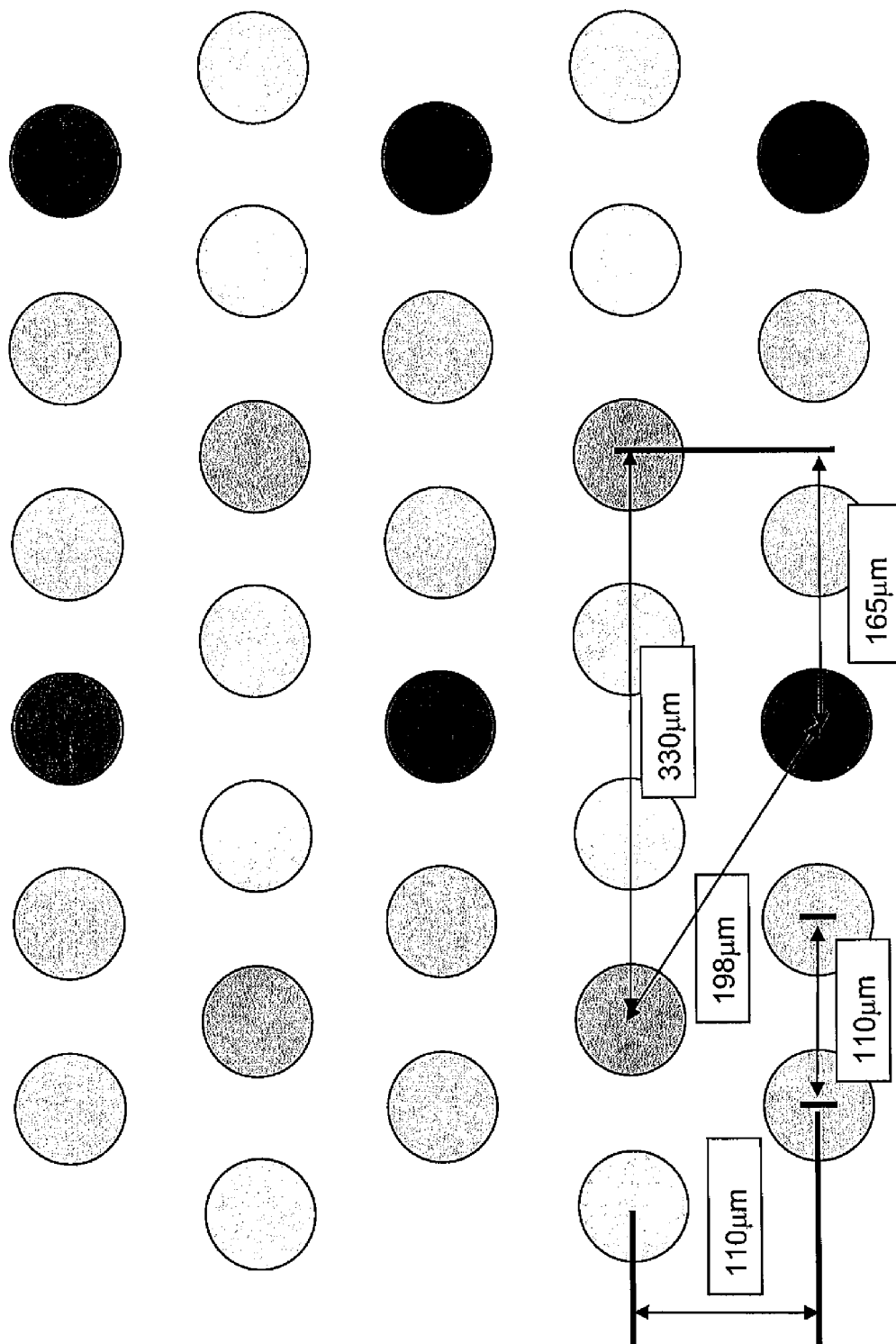


Fig. 57

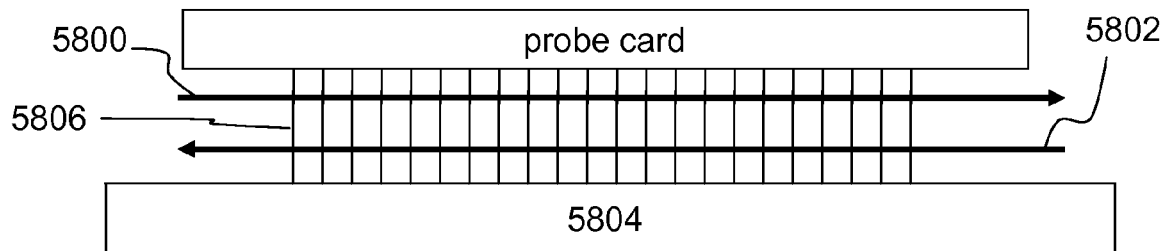


Fig. 58

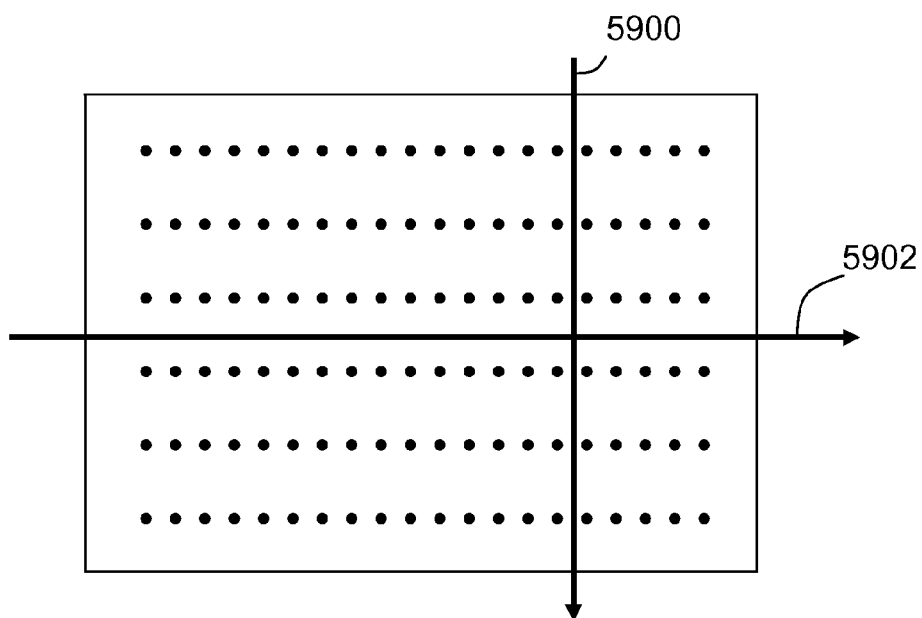


Fig. 59

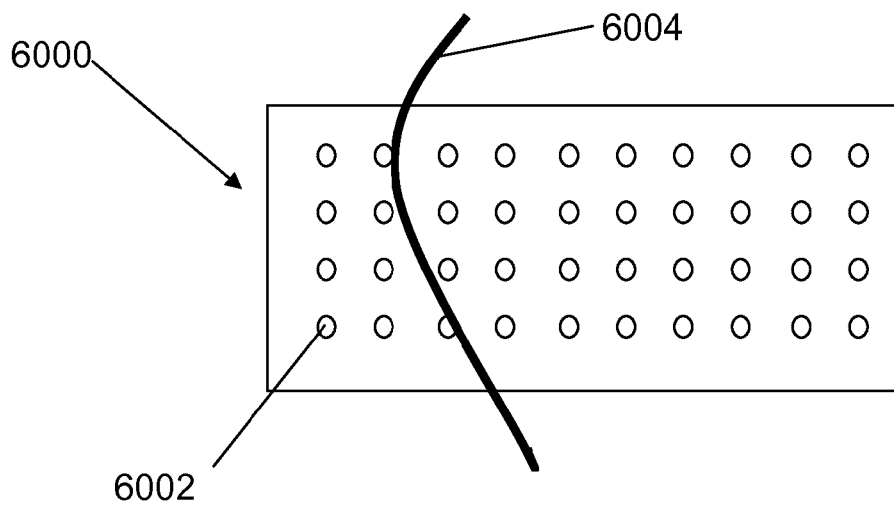


Fig. 60

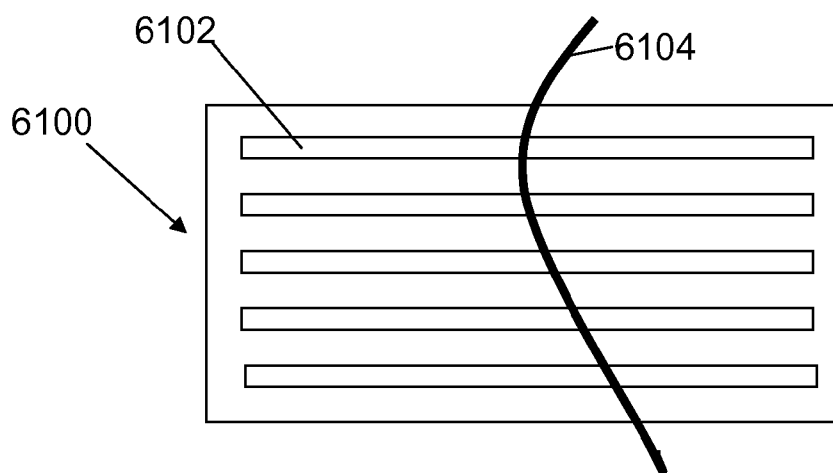


Fig. 61

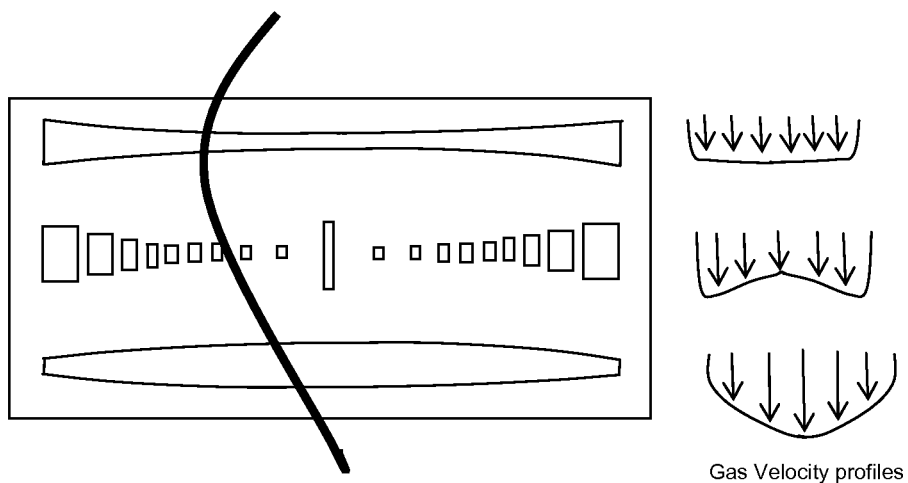


Fig. 62

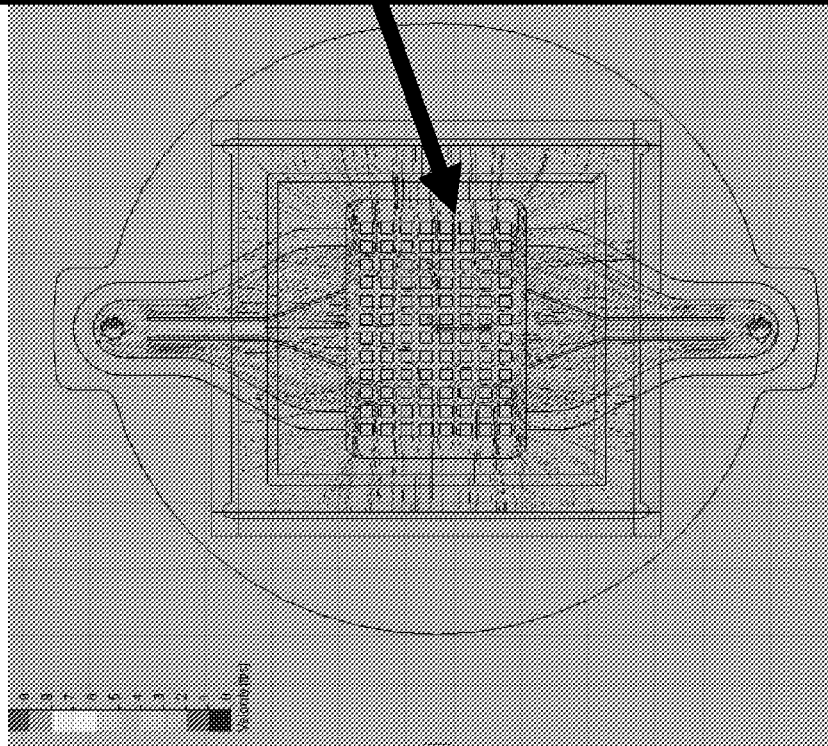
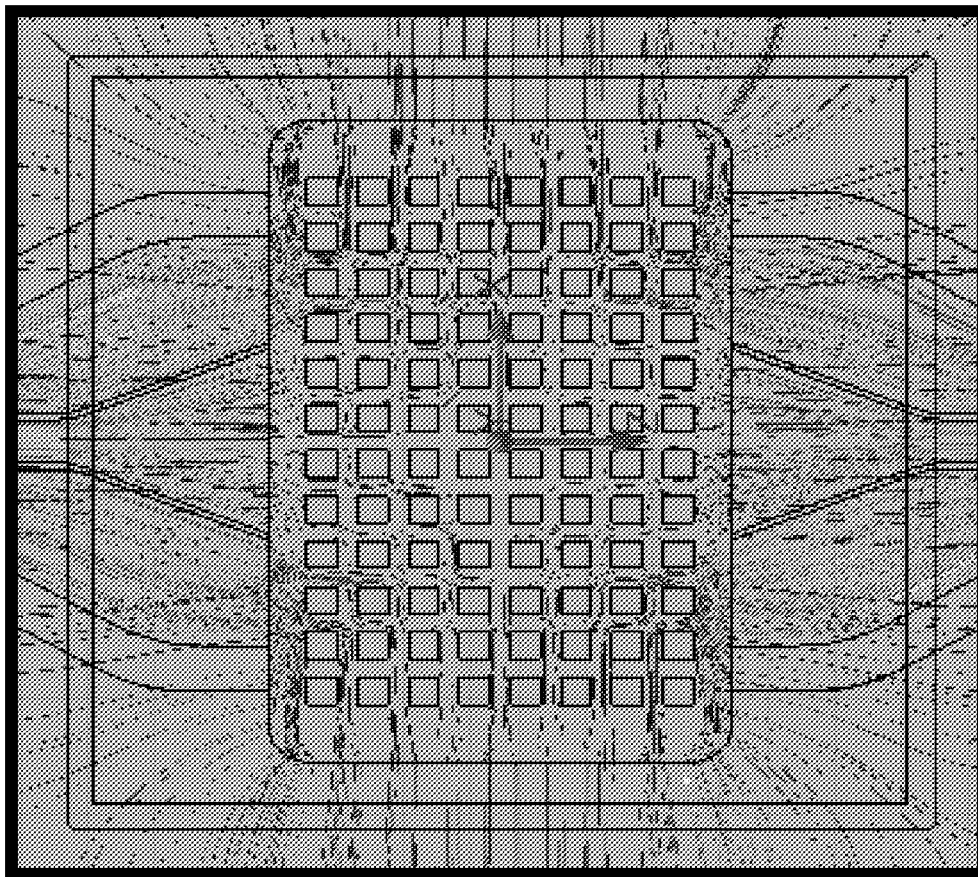


Fig. 63

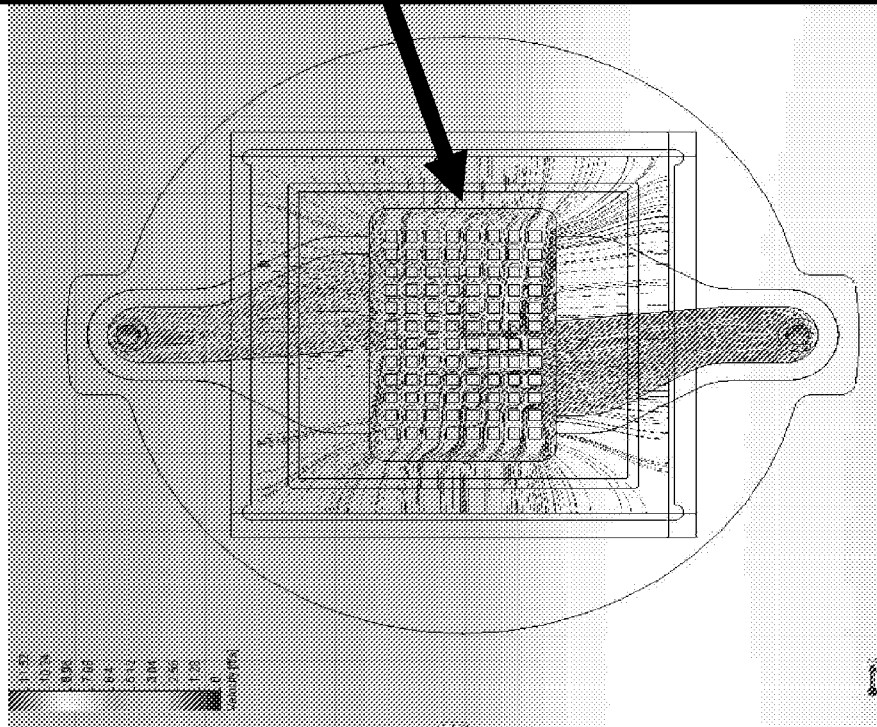
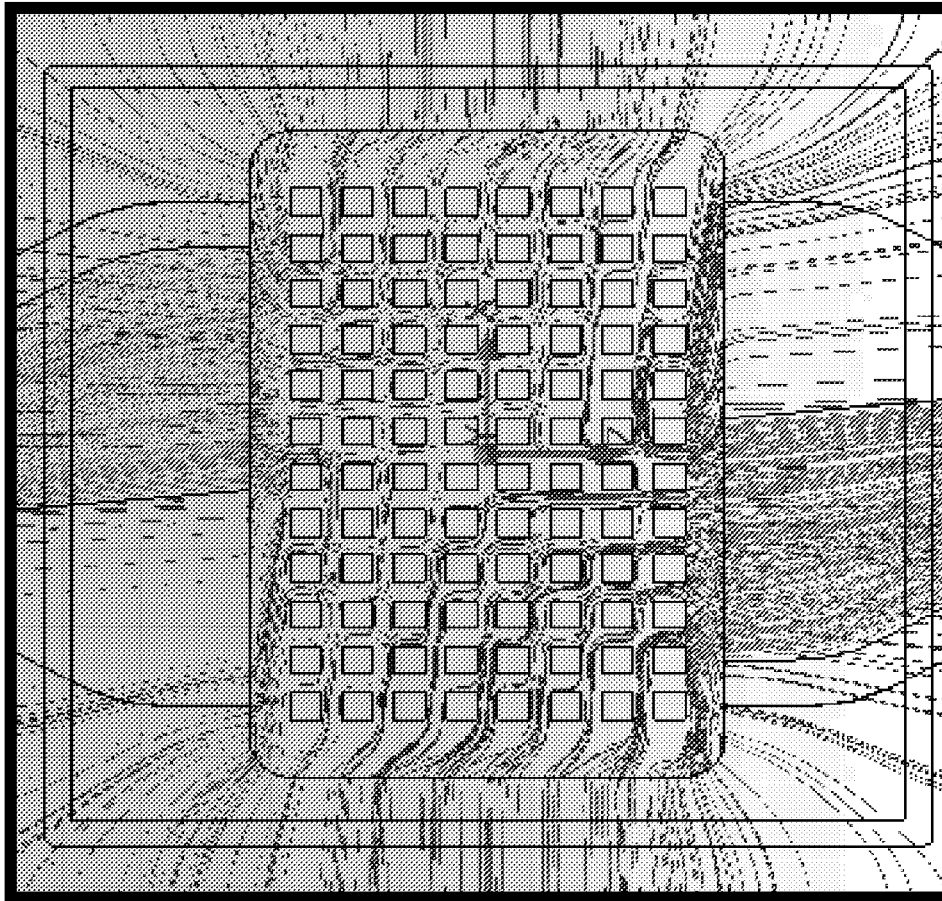


Fig. 64

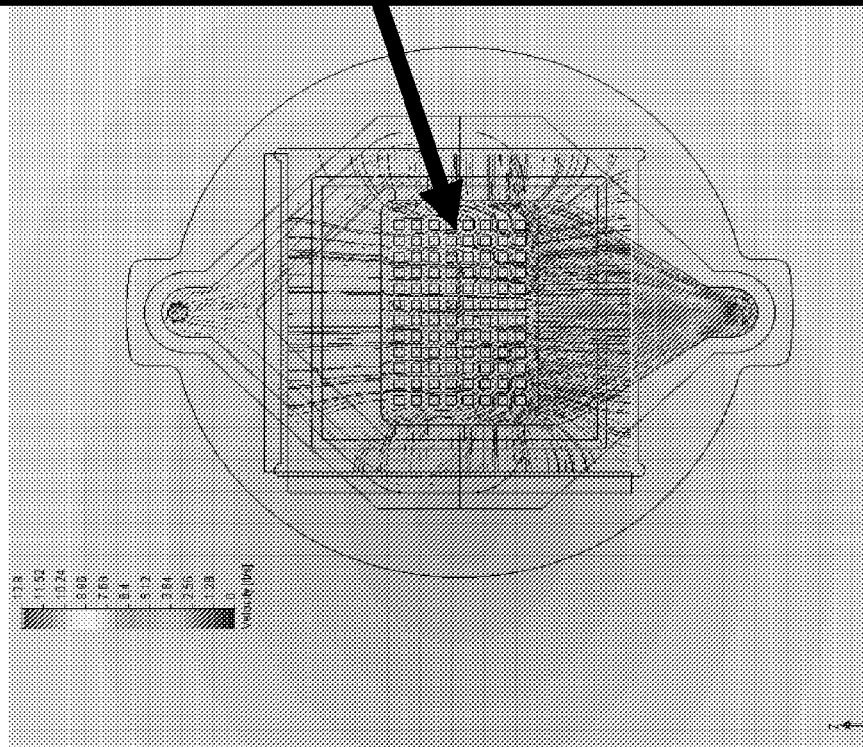
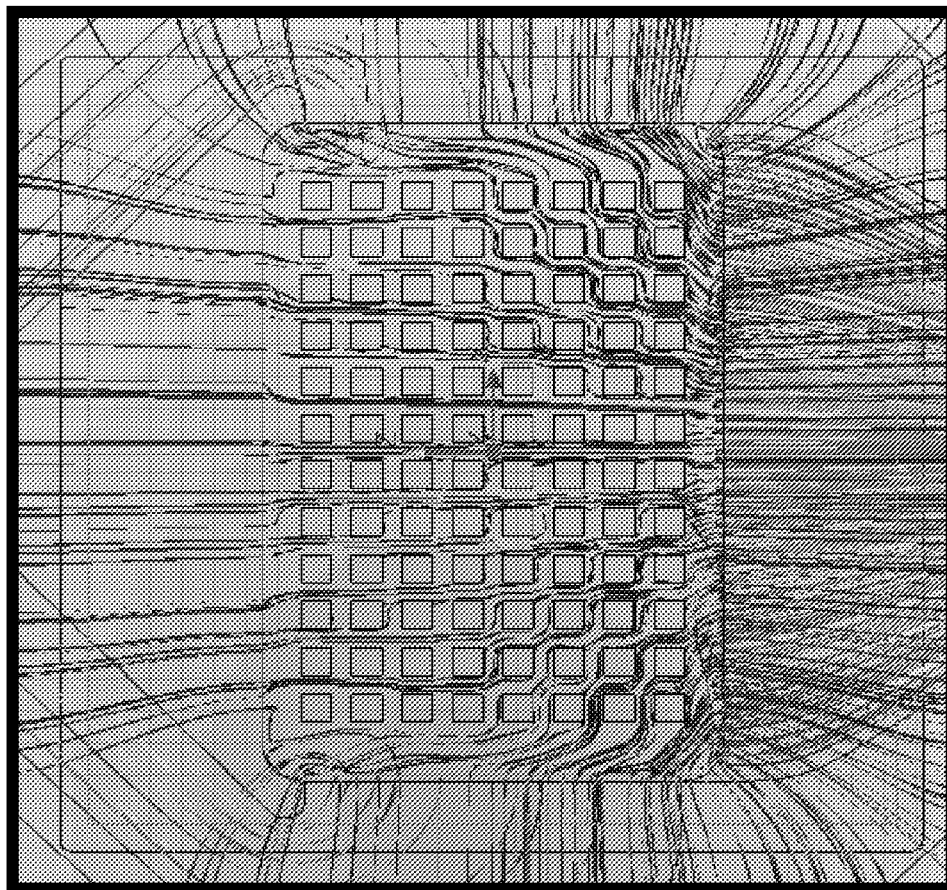


Fig. 65

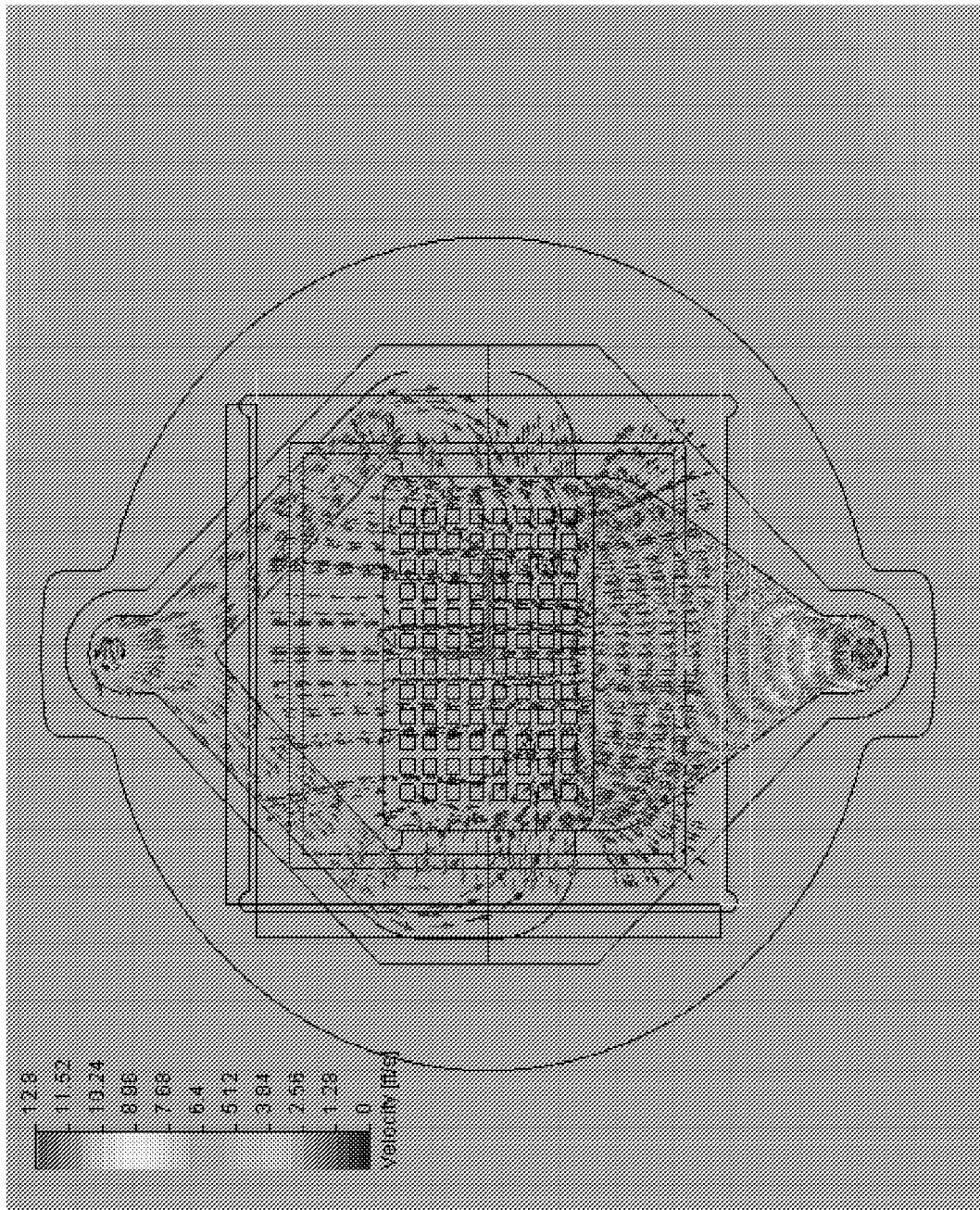


Fig. 66

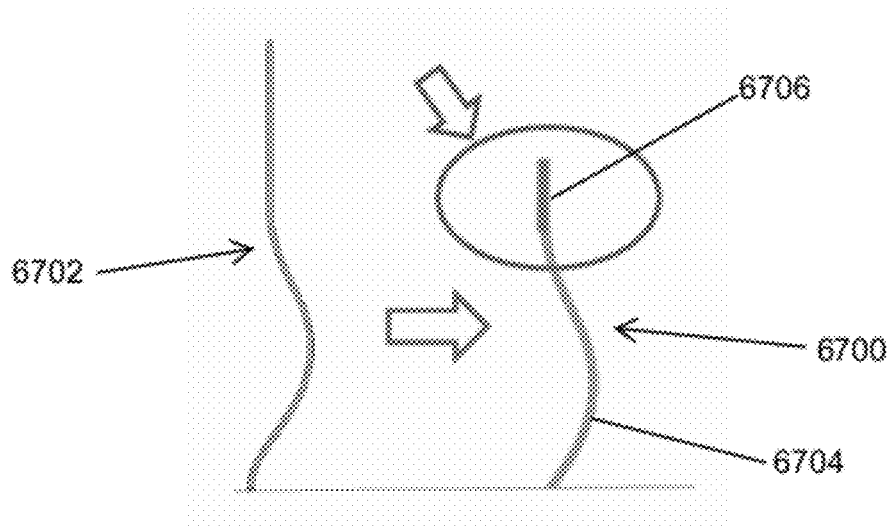


FIG. 67

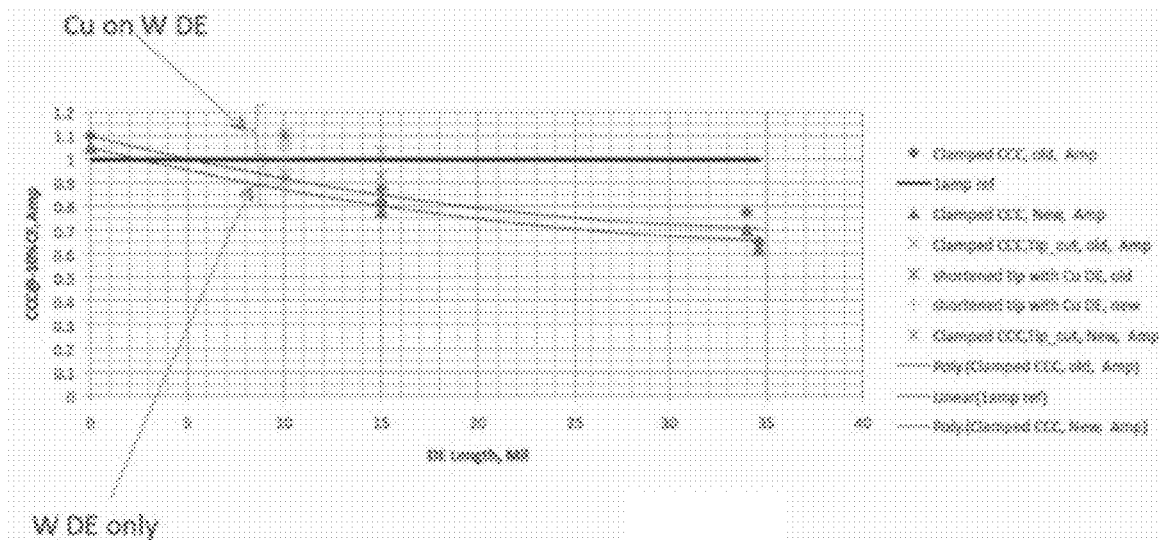


FIG. 68

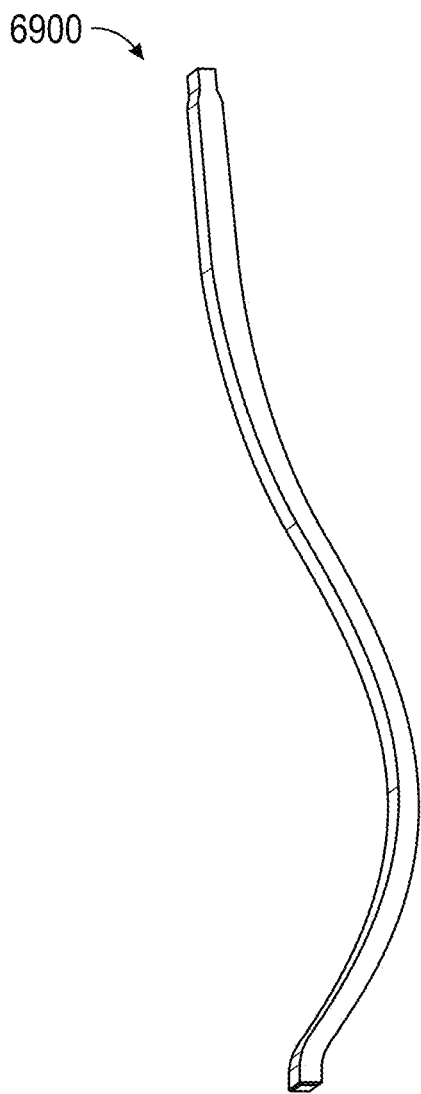


FIG. 69A

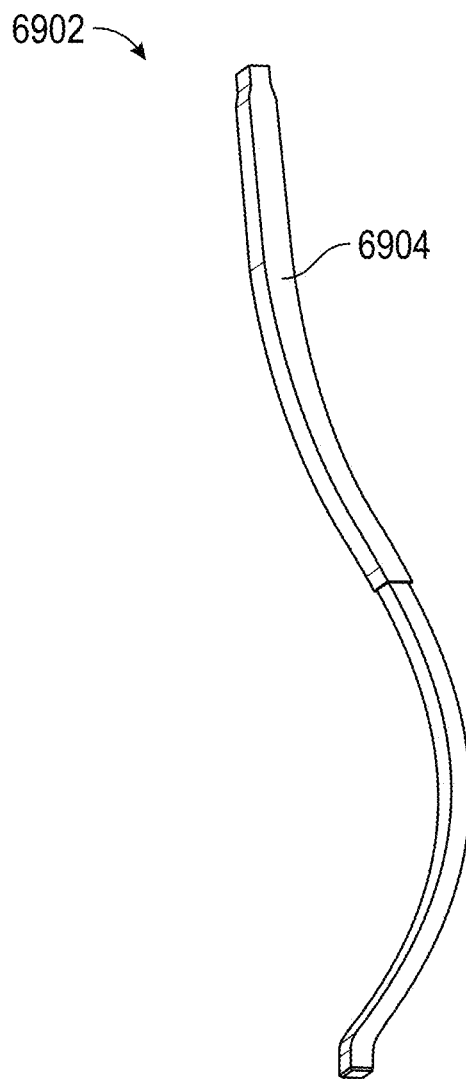


FIG. 69B

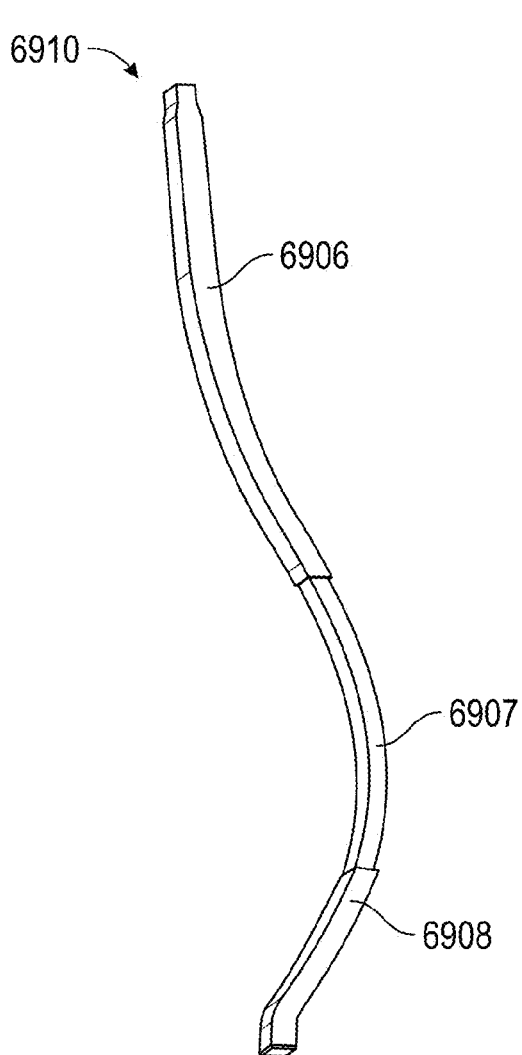


FIG. 69C

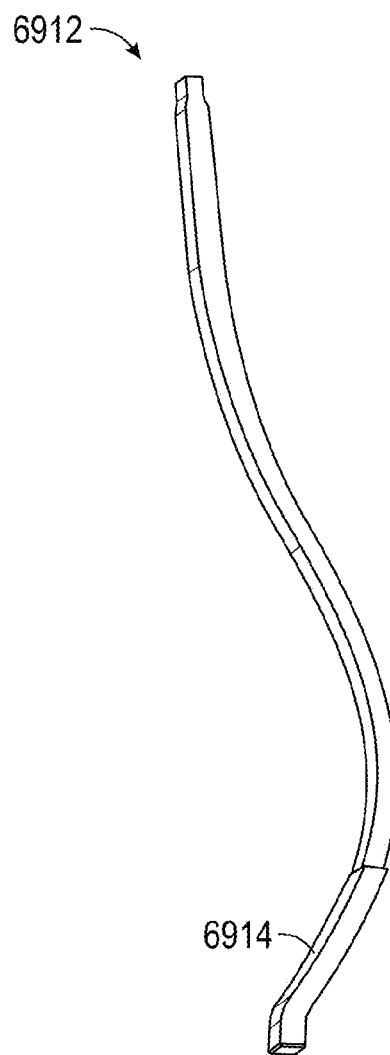


FIG. 69D

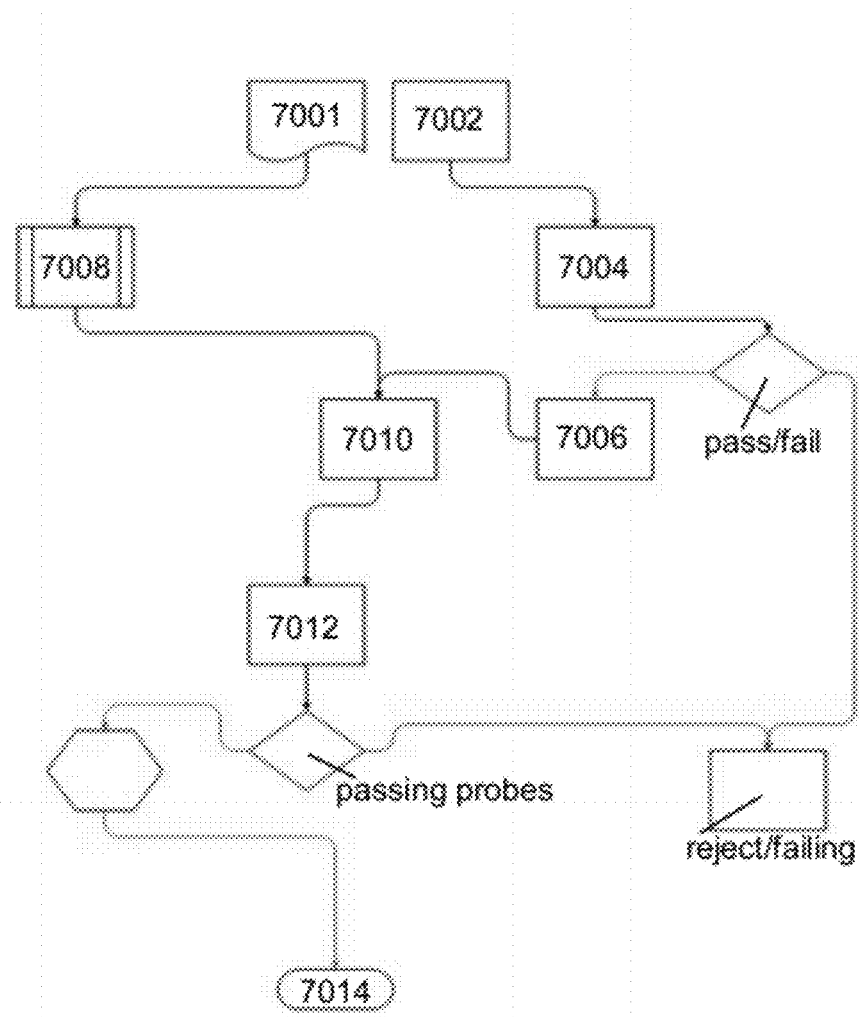


FIG. 70A

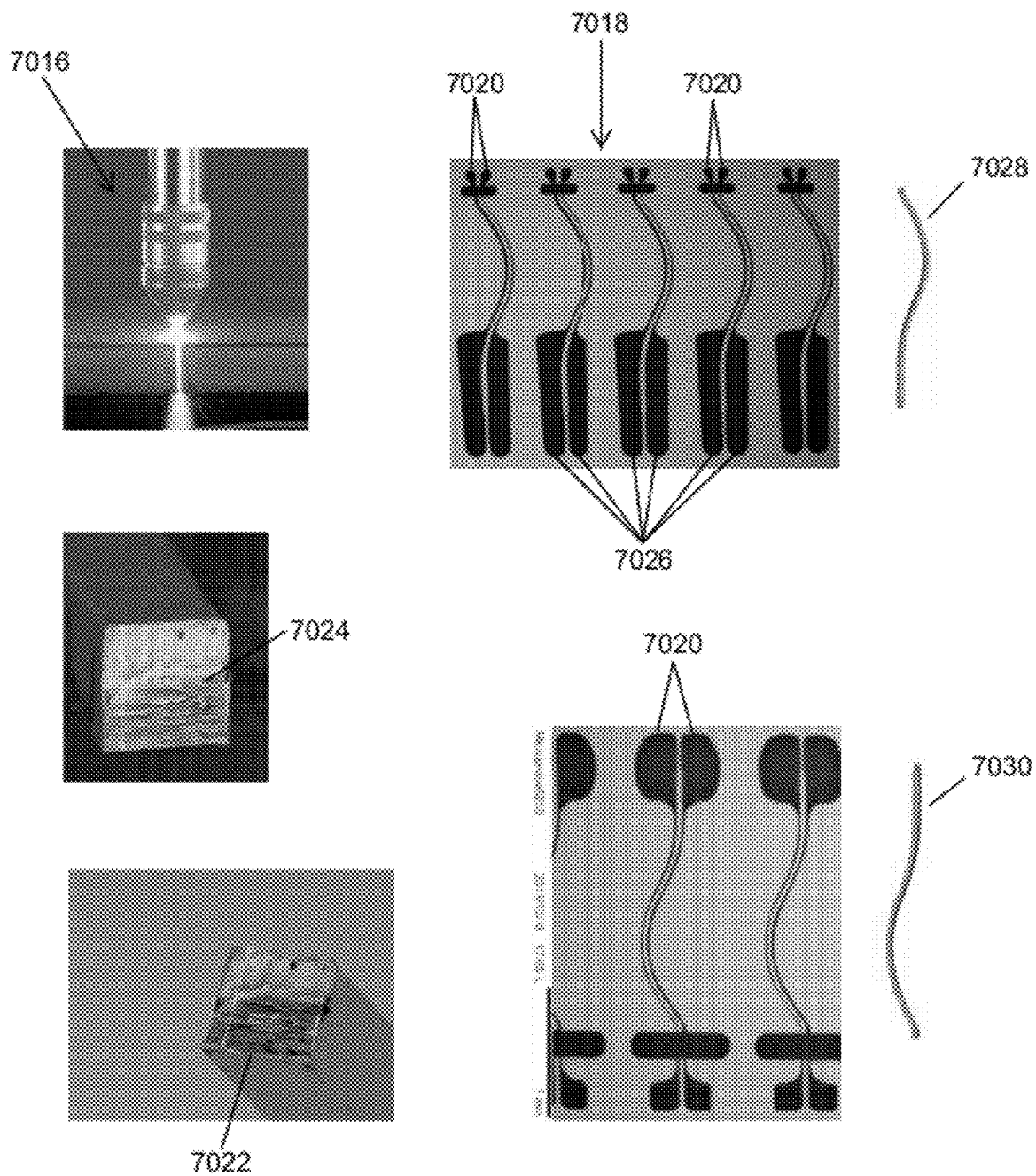


FIG. 70B

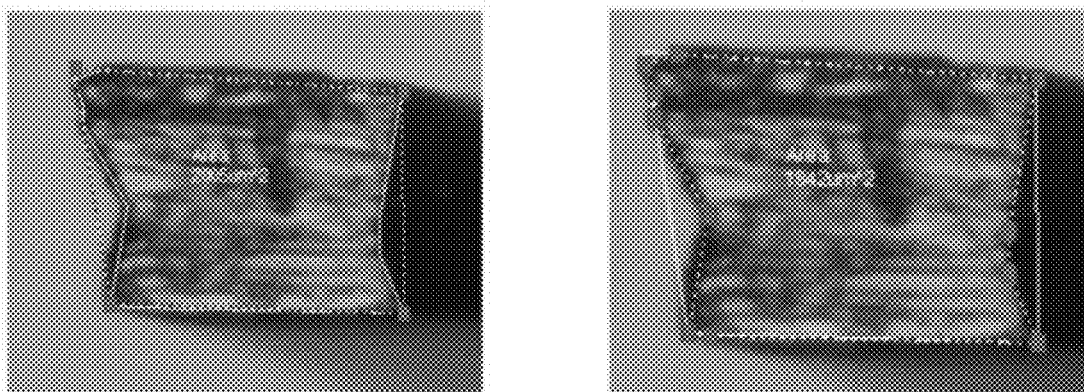


FIG. 71

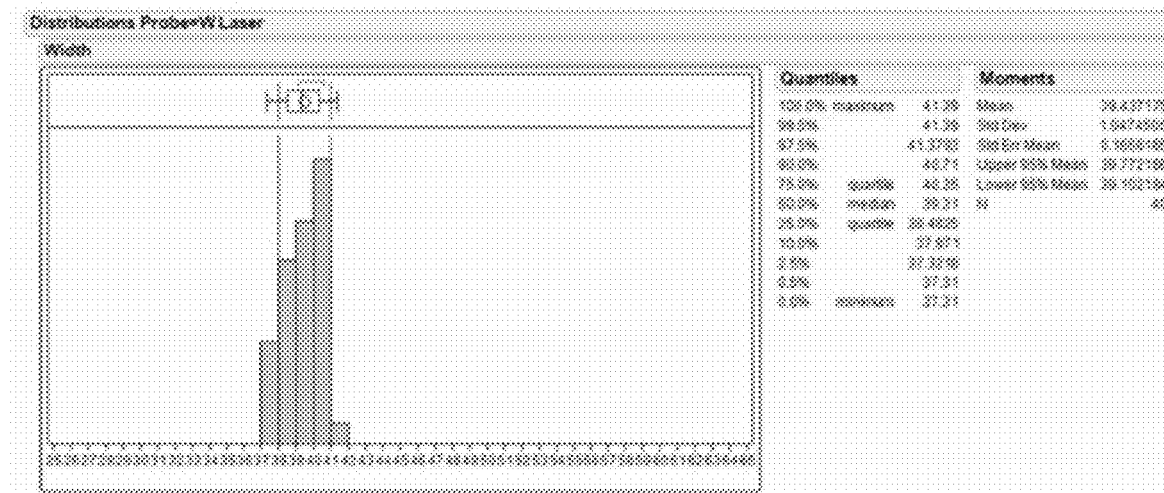


FIG. 72A

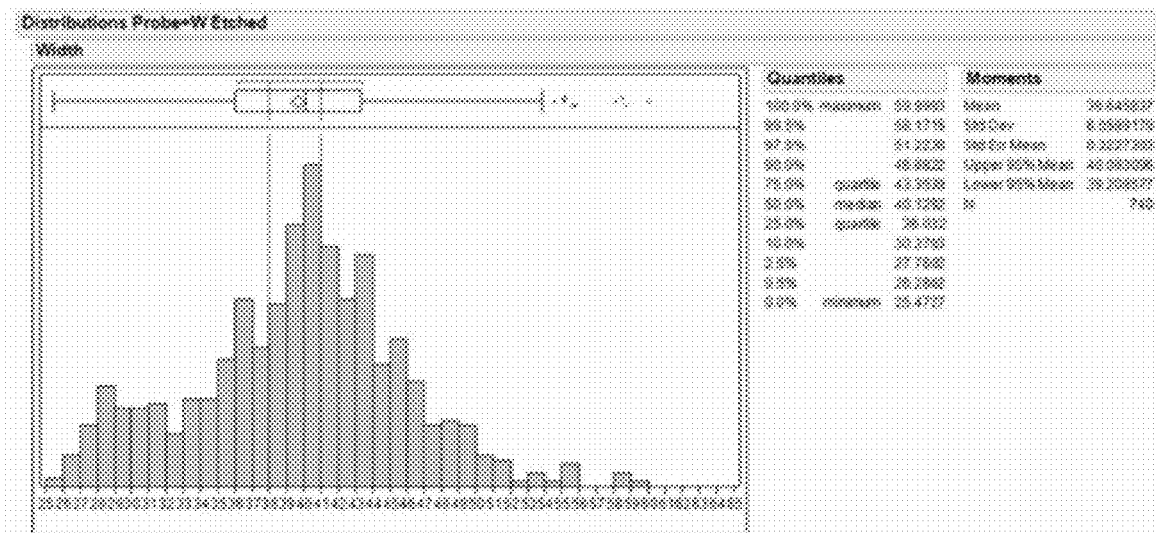


FIG. 72B

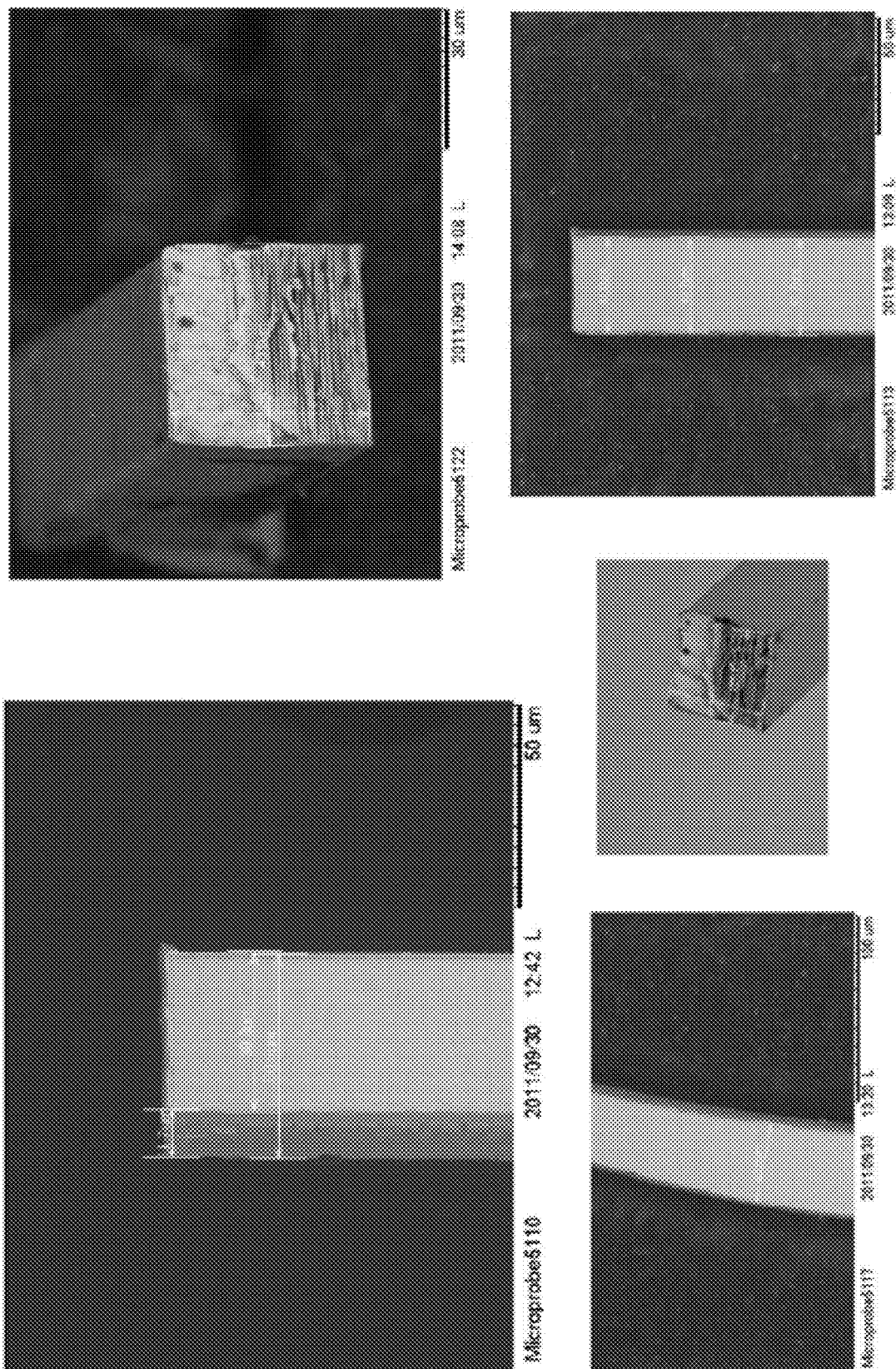


FIG. 73

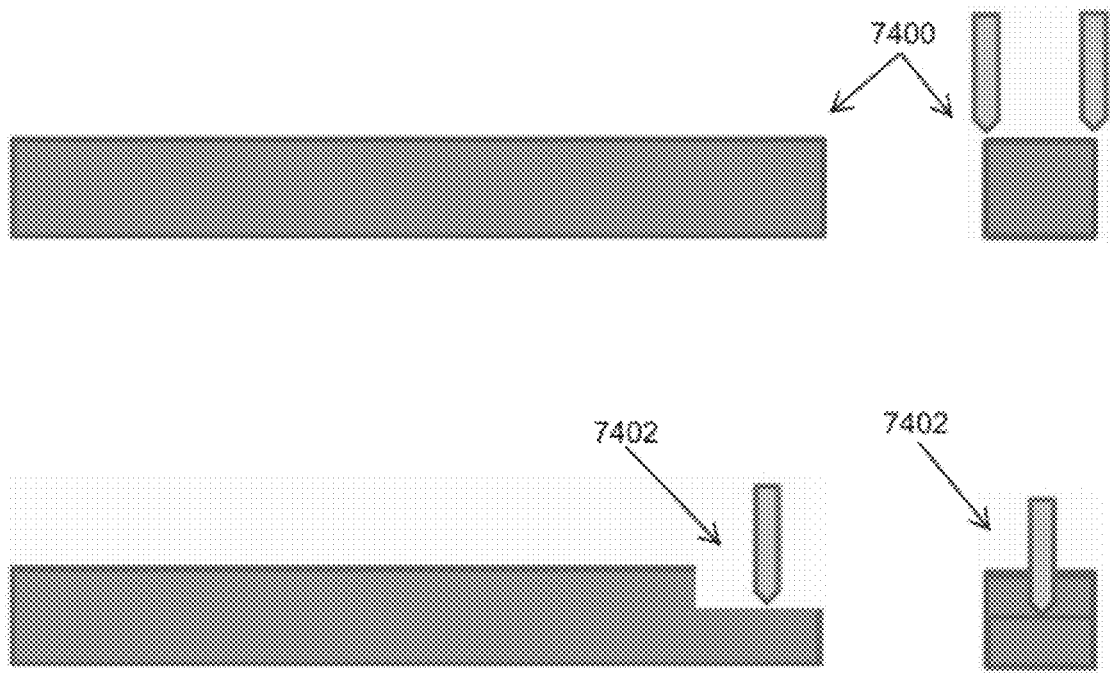


FIG. 74A

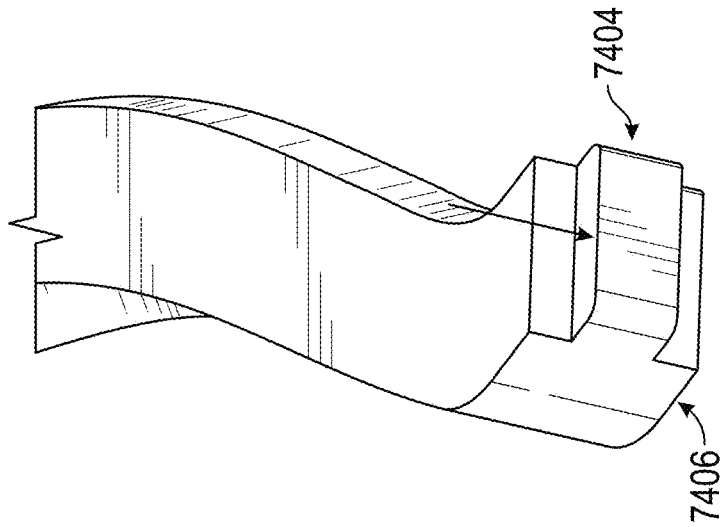
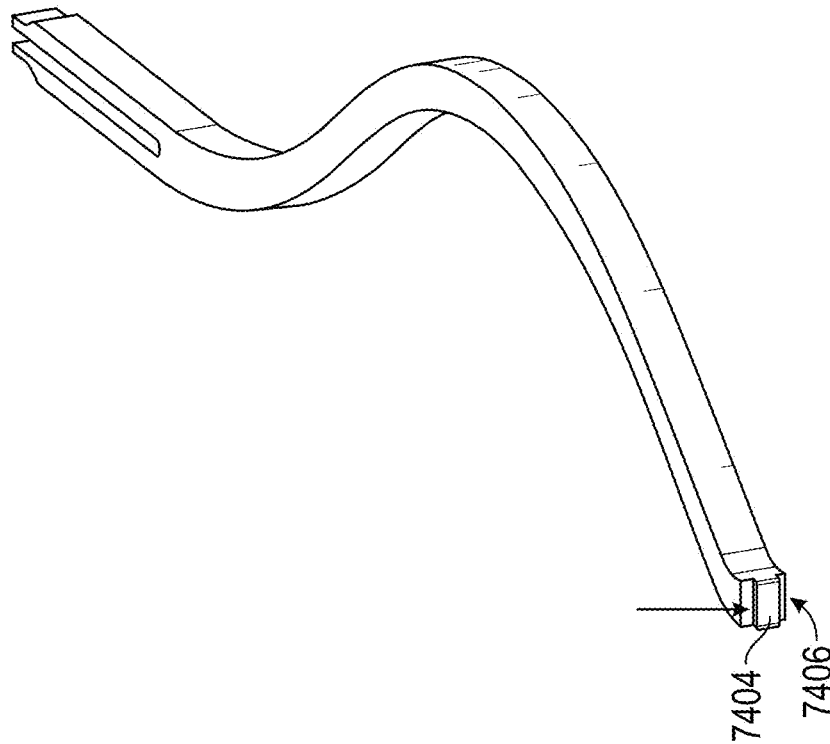


FIG. 74B



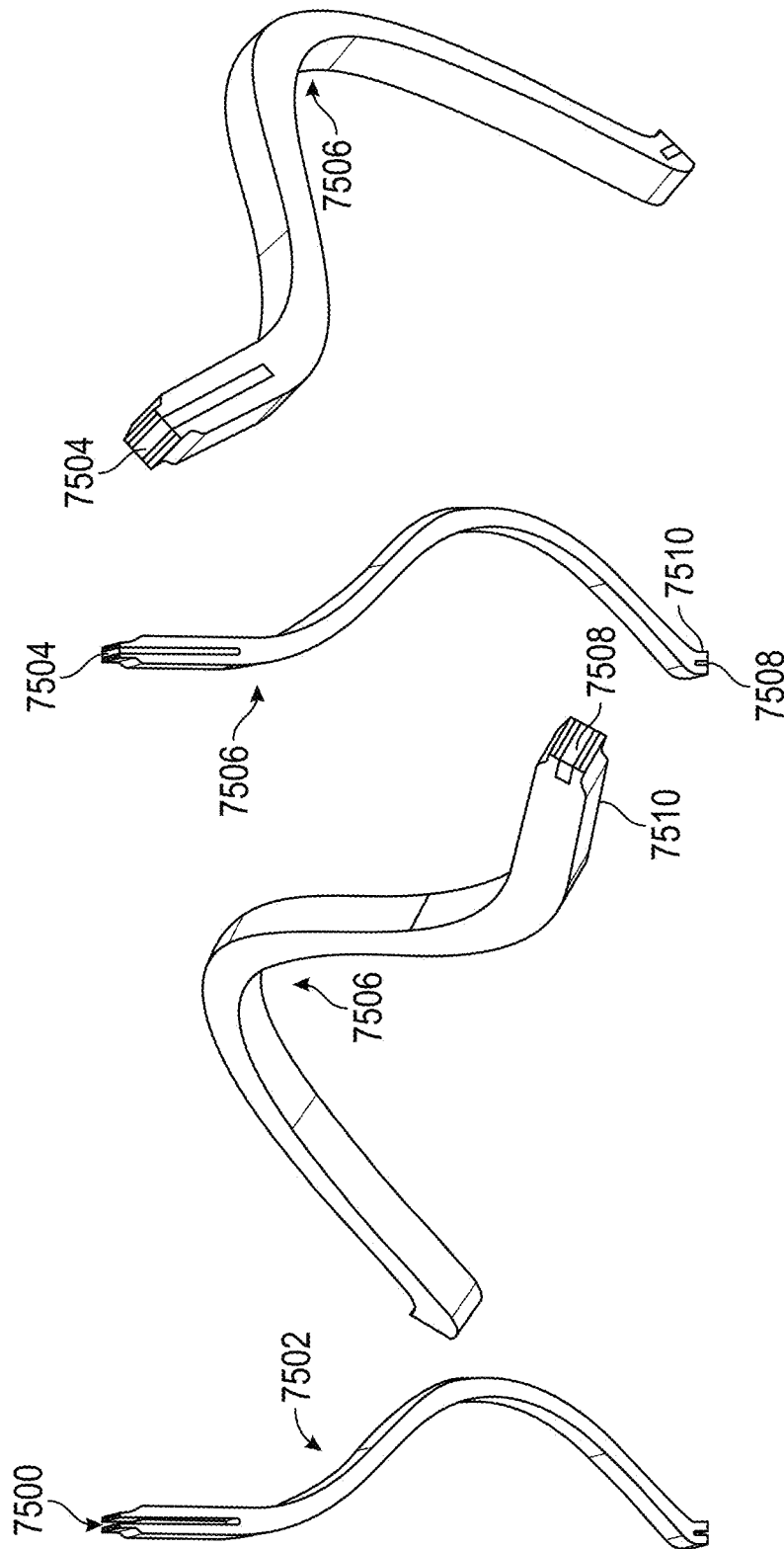


FIG. 75

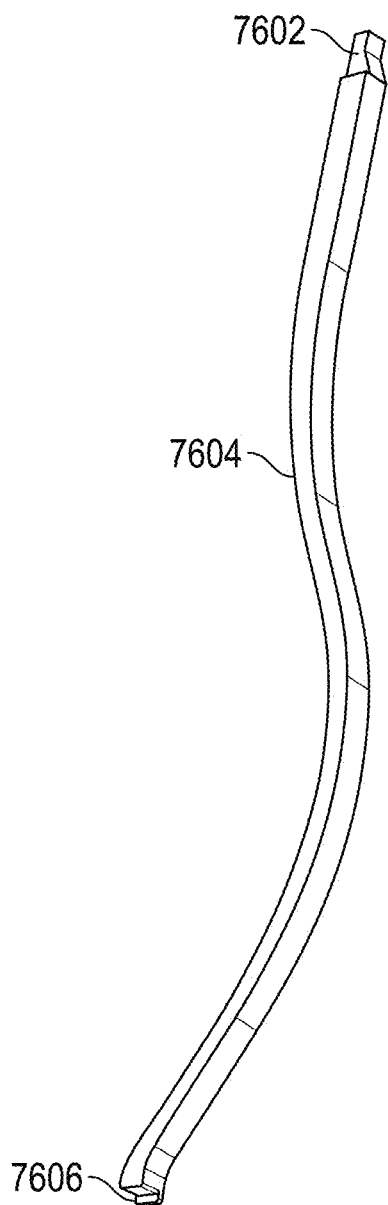


FIG. 76A

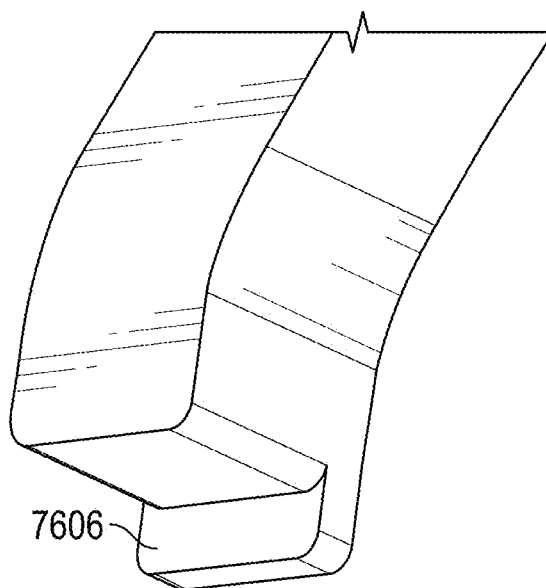


FIG. 76B

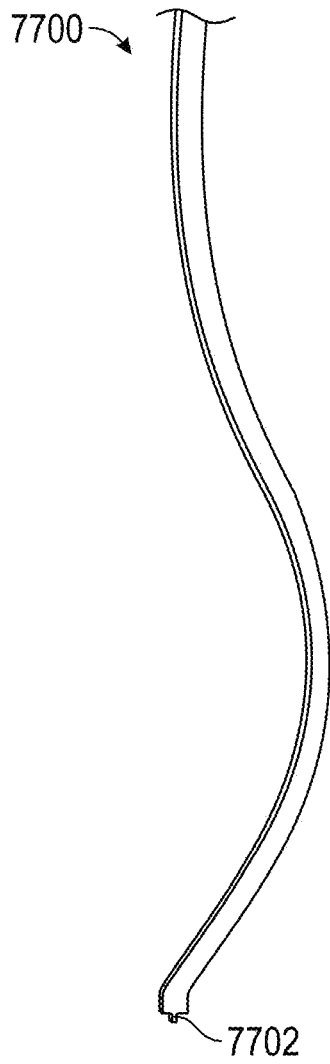


FIG. 77A

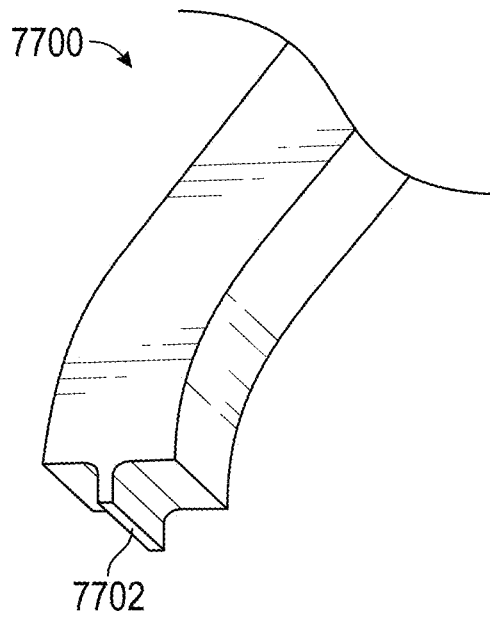


FIG. 77B

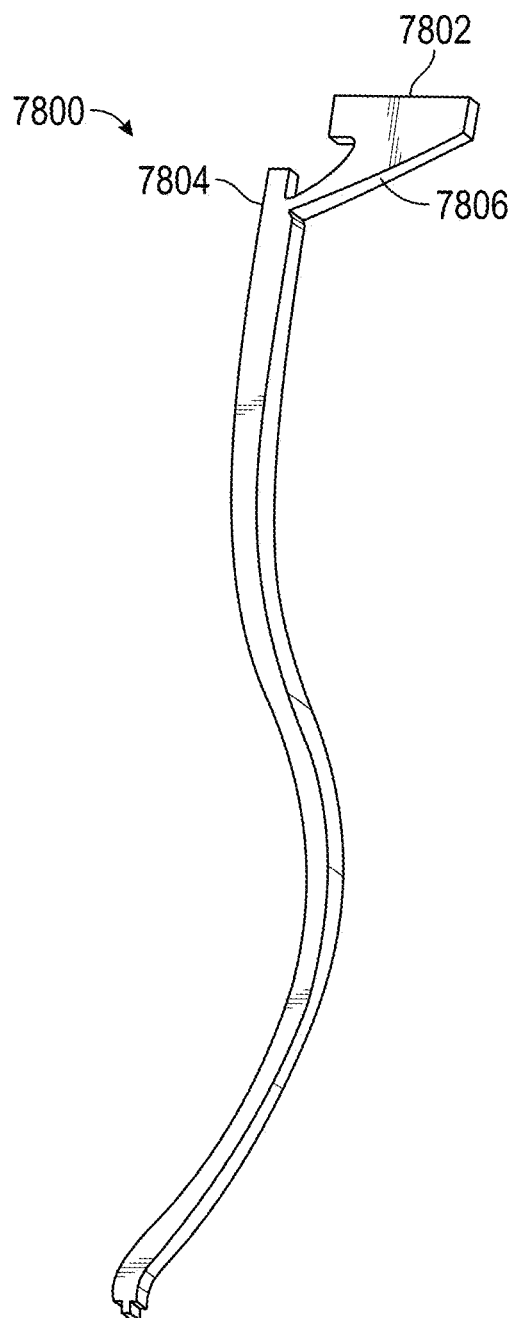


FIG. 78

PROBES WITH HIGH CURRENT CARRYING CAPABILITY AND LASER MACHINING METHODS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part to U.S. patent applicant Ser. No. 12/880,808, entitled "Multiple Contact Probes", to January Kister, filed Sep. 13, 2010, which is a continuation-in-part to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/703,063, entitled "Layered Probes with Core", to January Kister, filed on Feb. 9, 2010, which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/521,944 entitled "Knee Probe Having Reduced Thickness Section for Control of Scrub Motion", to January Kister, filed Sep. 14, 2006 (now U.S. Pat. No. 7,659,739) which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/450,977 entitled "Knee Probe Having Increased Scrub Motion", to January Kister, filed on Jun. 9, 2006 (now U.S. Pat. No. 7,733,101) which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/850,921, entitled "Freely Deflecting Knee Probe with Controlled Scrub Motion", to January Kister, filed May 21, 2004 (now U.S. Pat. No. 7,148,709), and all of the specifications and claims of the applications listed above are incorporated herein by reference.

This application claims priority to and the benefit of the filing of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/628,012, entitled "Fine pitch probes having high current carrying capability", filed on Oct. 21, 2011, and the specification thereof is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to electrical probes for automated circuit and device testing.

2. Description of Related Art

In the field of electronic circuitry testing, scrubbing and contact force is an important factor in establishing a low resistance electrical contact between a probe tip and the test contact. During scrubbing, an eventual insulating oxide layer is removed in the interface between the contact tip and the test contact. Scrubbing is a microscopic shear movement of the probe tip along the test contact surface while a certain pressure is exerted from the probe tip onto the test contact. As size and pitch of test contacts decrease, it becomes increasingly difficult to tune the scrub motion irrespective of friction influences in the tip/contact interface. Also, as the integrated circuit (IC) manufacturers incorporate designs with IC pads and bumps placed over chip's active circuitry it becomes important that the scrub of the probe does not cause damage to the underlying circuitry. The size of the window of acceptable probe operation therefore, is restrained from one side by the contact resistance requirements calling for a sizable scrub, smaller scrub size required by smaller targets that need to be probed as pitches decrease, and smaller scrub (including depth) to avoid damage to the underlying circuitry.

The new generation of IC chips has pads that are placed over active circuitry in order to maximize use of the real estate. These types of chips are commonly referred in the industry as chips with "low-K dielectric". The low-K dielectric refers to the fragile polymer-based insulator now placed between the pads and the underlying circuits for electrical

purposes. It is not acceptable to damage the low-K dielectric during probing operations either.

Well known buckling beam probes have been utilized to provide a combined resilient deflection and scrubbing. In order for a buckling beam probe to operate properly with a well defined scrub motion it needs to be rigidly held on its peripheral shaft and additionally guided close to the contact tip. This makes the buckling beam probe's assembly increasingly challenging with ever decreasing scale. Therefore, there exists a need for a probe that may be easily assembled in large numbers and small scale while providing a well definable scrub motion. The present invention addresses this need.

The contact resistance issue has also been addressed by probes having separate parts for scrubbing and for making electrical contact. For example, US 2004/0239352 considers dual probes having a contact probe and a separate scrub probe, where the scrub probe moves in such a way as to clean the part of the contact pad that will end up under the contact probe during test. In some cases (e.g., copper deposition manufacturing), circuit fabrication processes provide contact pads which are covered with a protective dielectric film (e.g., a silicon dioxide film). U.S. Pat. No. 6,727,719 considers a probe having an inner contact needle and an outer hard layer, where the hard outer layer is adapted for penetrating such a protective film.

An important consequence of decreasing probe and contact pad dimensions is that the current density at the probe-pad contact increases. This increased current density also raises issues which have not come up before in connection with large probes on large pads. More specifically, the current density can be high enough to form micro-welds between the probe and the pad due to local heating. Breaking these micro-welds as the probe is removed from the contact pad can lead to degradation of the probe tip (e.g., by accumulation of non-conductive material), thereby reducing probe reliability and/or lifetime.

Testing of electrical devices and circuits has been an important component of electronic manufacturing processes for some time. Such testing typically entails probing a circuit with a fixture including multiple flexible probes, each probe making electrical contact to a contact pad on the circuit chip. Various practical issues that have arisen in this context have been addressed in the prior art, especially in connection with providing reliable, low-resistance electrical contact.

Electrical contact between the probe and the contact pad can also be hampered by the presence of non-conductive material on the pad and/or the probe (e.g., a thin oxide film). Accordingly, considerable attention has been devoted to details of how the tip of the probe moves relative to the contact pad in order to improve the resulting electrical connection. This relative motion is usually referred to as a scrub motion. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,923,178 considers a probe having a shape which provides a scrub motion which is primarily a rocking motion without appreciable sliding. U.S. Pat. No. 5,952,843 considers a probe having a canted tip portion to facilitate penetration of the passivation layer. U.S. Pat. No. 6,529,021 considers a probe arrangement where the probe tip can be made to move in a reciprocating manner to reduce contact resistance.

As circuit manufacturing technology continues to evolve to smaller critical dimensions, new practical issues relating to probing tend to arise which are not fully addressed by prior art approaches. For example, the decreasing size of contact pads as critical dimensions are reduced leads to increasingly demanding requirements on the ability to pre-

3

cisely control the probe scrub motion. Excessive scrub motion can cause loss of electrical contact, if the probe moves off the contact pad.

Accordingly, it would be an advance in the art to provide greater control of probe scrub motion.

A normally operating IC typically draws a current on the order of 100 mA through its probes. Providing this level of current carrying capacity is not problematic with present day technology. However, when probing ICs, it is possible to encounter a defective IC that draws far more probe current than normal (e.g., 1 A or more). In such situations, it is important to ensure that the probe is not permanently damaged by this over-current condition. The probe failure mode of most concern is typically inelastic probe deformation that causes the probe to go out of spec (e.g., to have an out-of-spec contact force), as opposed to catastrophic fusing of the probe. This inelastic deformation failure mode is thermally driven, and only arises as a current driven failure mode because of resistive heating of the probe by current passing through the probe. This problem has only become apparent recently, because earlier probe technology had probe dimensions such that probes were not damaged by this kind of over-current condition.

In embodiments of the present invention, this problem is addressed by providing forced gas cooling of the probe array and/or employing two different types of probes for probing an IC, namely power/ground probes and signal probes.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

One embodiment of the present invention comprises a probe for testing a device. The probe of this embodiment comprises a probe body comprising a first high strength material and a portion of the probe body comprising a coating of a different second material, the different second material comprising a conductive material. The portion can be a distal end of a probe. The distal end is preferably shortened and is between about 0.1 mm to about 0.5 mm. The portion can be a flexing portion, a straight portion, a curved portion or a rigid portion. The first material can comprise tungsten and/or molybdenum and/or a mixed-phase composite. The second material can comprise copper, aluminum, gold, and/or silver. A tip end of the probe body can comprise the first material, the second material or a different third material. The different third material can comprises rhodium, rhenium, ruthenium, a metal alloy, a metal from the platinum element group, combinations thereof or the like. The distal end of the probe of this embodiment can comprise a trench. The trench preferably comprises a metal, for example, copper. The tip of the probe can also comprise a trench. The trench in the tip of the probe preferably comprises a metal, for example, copper. A material can also be sintered onto the probe. The tip of the probe preferably comprises a skate. The skate can be comprised of the first material, the different second material or the different third material.

Another embodiment of the present invention comprises a method of laser machining a probe. The method of this embodiment comprises fixturing a probe material on a surface such that the probe material is elevated above the surface, cutting the probe material to a depth via a laser following a predetermined probe path, and repeating the laser cutting step until the probe material is cut through. The laser can also cut a step in the tip of a probe, reduce the width of the tip of the probe to create a skate, cut a trench in the

4

probe and/or form a chisel at a tip of the probe. The laser is preferably a picosecond or nanosecond laser.

Objects, advantages and novel features, and further scope of applicability of the present invention will be set forth in part in the detailed description to follow, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, and in part will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon examination of the following, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention may be realized and attained by means of the instrumentalities and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated into and form a part of the specification, illustrate one or more embodiments of the present invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention. The drawings are only for the purpose of illustrating one or more preferred embodiments of the invention and are not to be construed as limiting the invention. In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a first perspective view of an exemplary probe in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is the first perspective view of a number of probes of FIG. 1 in exemplary assembly array.

FIG. 3 is a top view of the probe array of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 is the top view of the probe array of FIG. 2 together with sandwiched fixture and clamping plate in aligned cutout position for probe insertion.

FIG. 5 is a second perspective view of the assembly of FIG. 4.

FIG. 6 is the second perspective view of the assembly of FIG. 5 in shear clamp configuration.

FIG. 7 is the second perspective view of the assembly of FIG. 6 with the top fixture plate being removed for illustration purpose.

FIG. 8 is a third perspective view of an exemplary probe comb of a number of linearly arrayed probes combined by a bridge.

FIG. 9 is a schematic front view of a suspension knee in deflected and non deflected condition.

FIGS. 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, and 19 are front views of spectral displacement plots of various configurations of suspension knees.

FIG. 11 is a front view of a spectral stress plot of the suspension knee of FIG. 10.

FIG. 13 is a front view of a spectral stress plot of the suspension knee of FIG. 12.

FIG. 15 is a front view of a spectral stress plot of the suspension knee of FIG. 14.

FIG. 18 is a front view of a spectral stress plot of the suspension knee of FIG. 17.

FIG. 20 is a front view of a multiradius contacting tip in initial contact with a test contact.

FIG. 21 is the front view with the multiradius contacting tip of FIG. 20 in operational contact with the test contact of FIG. 20.

FIG. 22 is a fourth perspective view of a contacting tip with three tip segments.

FIG. 23a shows a first contact probe configuration according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 23b shows an operational probe configuration according to an embodiment of the invention.

5

FIG. 24 shows a close up view of a probe tip making contact to a contact pad according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 25 shows a close up view of a probe tip making contact to a contact pad according to another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 26 shows a close up view of a probe tip making contact to a contact pad according to yet another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 27a shows a photograph of a probe tip.

FIG. 27b shows a photograph of the probe tip of FIG. 27a after 1,000,000 probing cycles according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIGS. 28a-d are photographs of probe array configurations suitable for use with embodiments of the invention.

FIG. 29 shows a depth profile for a scrub mark made in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 30 shows a probe according to a first embodiment of the invention.

FIGS. 31-32 show alternate embodiments of the invention having different tip offsets.

FIGS. 33-34 show alternate embodiments of the invention having different upper knee section thickness profiles.

FIG. 35 shows an embodiment of the invention having a tapered lower knee section.

FIG. 36 shows an embodiment of the invention in an initial contact configuration.

FIG. 37 shows an embodiment of the invention in an operating contact configuration.

FIG. 38 shows a probe according to another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 39 illustrates an embodiment comprising a probe with at least two inner layers and two outer layers.

FIG. 40 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a multi-layer probe with a central layer comprising a high conductivity material and a tip comprising a harder material than the high conductivity material.

FIG. 41 illustrates examples of embodiments of the present invention comprising layered probes.

FIG. 42 illustrates a probe with a crack after operational testing was performed.

FIG. 43 illustrates stress distribution in three probe designs.

FIG. 44 illustrates an example of the correlation between high-temperature and high-stress regions of a probe.

FIG. 45 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a high-conductivity core that is trimmed to remove some of its highest-stress material.

FIG. 46 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a probe design.

FIG. 47 illustrates another embodiment of the present invention comprising a different probe design.

FIG. 48 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a vertical core layer with respect to the overall core structure.

FIGS. 49-51 illustrate embodiments of the present invention comprising varying core geometries and varying layered probes.

FIGS. 52A-52B illustrate example dimensions and shapes of a power/ground probe and a signal probe;

FIG. 53 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a probe tip having a sacrificial substrate in addition to the skate at which contact is made with a device under test;

FIG. 54 illustrates a probe comprising a sacrificial substrate in about the center of the probe;

6

FIGS. 55A-55D illustrate an embodiment of the present invention comprising a power/ground probe in mechanical contact with a single contact pad;

FIGS. 56 and 57 illustrate embodiments of the present invention comprising a set of contact pads wherein every third pad of the power/ground lines is probed;

FIG. 58 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising gas flows in opposite directions across a probe array;

FIG. 59 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising gas flows in perpendicular directions across a probe array;

FIG. 60 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a nozzle array having holes;

FIG. 61 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a nozzle array having slots;

FIG. 62 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a nozzle array having different shaped openings;

FIG. 63 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising two opposite gas flows without offset being circulated around and through a probe array;

FIG. 64 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising two opposite gas flows with offset being circulated around and through a probe array;

FIGS. 65 and 66 illustrate embodiments of the present invention comprising one main gas flow and two lateral reinforced gas flows;

FIG. 67 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a probe with a shortened distal end, the distal end comprising a first material and the tip end comprising a different second material with a portion between the distal end and tip end comprising the different second material;

FIG. 68 illustrates a graph of distal end (DE) length v. CCC@10% CF, Amps;

FIG. 69A illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a probe;

FIGS. 69B-69D illustrate embodiments of probes comprising two or more different materials;

FIG. 70A illustrates a flow chart of a method of laser machining a probe;

FIG. 70B illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising laser machined probes;

FIG. 71 illustrates photographs of an etched probe;

FIG. 72A-72B illustrate graphs of a width distribution of an etched probe and a width distribution of a laser machined probe;

FIG. 73 are photographs of laser machined probes of one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 74A illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a laser cut step in the thickness of a probe;

FIG. 74B illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a laser cut skate disposed on a probe tip;

FIG. 75 illustrates embodiments of the present invention comprising probes having trenches;

FIGS. 76A and 76B illustrate an embodiment of the present invention comprising an offset probe tip skate design for a laser-machined probe;

FIGS. 77A and 77B illustrate an embodiment of the present invention comprising a chiseled probe skate design made during laser-machining; and

FIG. 78 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising a probe attached to a frame during probe laser cutting.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE
INVENTION

Columnar Structure

Referring to FIG. 1, a probe 1 in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention features a rigid columnar structure 2 having a peripheral end 21, a connect end 22, a knee opposing face 23, a connect face 24, a front face 25 and a back face 26. The columnar structure 2 is preferably symmetric with respect to a central column axis CA. At the connect end 22, a suspension knee 3 is laterally connecting via its base arm 32, which propagates away from the column axis CA substantially up to a lateral knee extension PK. A reverse arm 34 continues from the base arm 32. The reverse arm 34 propagates away from the lateral knee extension PK in direction towards the column axis CA with a reverse length RL. At the end of the reverse arm 34 is a contacting tip 35. The contacting tip 35 has a contacting face 36 with a tip axis TA central with respect to the contacting face 36. The tip axis TA is offset from the column axis CA in a tip offset TO. The tip offset TO is smaller than the lateral knee extension PK such that during application of a contacting force preferably along the tip axis TA a first deflection of the base arm 32 and a second deflection of the reverse arm 34 counteract, resulting in a predetermined scrub motion of the contacting tip 35. The suspension knee 3 is connected to the rigid columnar structure 2 via a suspension connect 31.

The probe 1 is preferably symmetric with respect to a symmetry plane SP that coincides with the column axis CA and the tip axis TA. As a preferred result, the scrub motion is substantially in plane with the symmetry plane SP. The probe 1 may have a continuous profile in direction perpendicular with respect to the symmetry plane SP such that the columnar structure 2 as well as the elements of the suspension knee 3 have substantially rectangular cross sections.

The columnar structure 2 has a first pair of adjacent faces and a second pair of adjacent faces, the first pair opposing the second pair. A first pair may be for example faces 24, 26 and a second pair may be faces 23, 25. The probe 1 may be fabricated in a layered fabrication technique such as well known electroplating in combination with negative shaped mask. Relevant dimensions of the probe 1 include probe thickness TH, total probe width WT, column width CW, column height CH, tip offset TO, lateral knee extension BL and reverse arm length RL. In the preferred case of substantially linearly protruding base arm 32 and/or reverse arm 34, relevant dimensions include also a base arm angle AB and reverse arm angle AR between a knee axis KA and their respective arms 32, 34. The knee axis KA is a geometric element coinciding with a center of a knee bent 33 referencing the orientation of the knee bent 33 with respect to the column axis CA. The knee axis may be utilized to characterize the displacement behavior of the suspension knee 3 as depicted in the spectral displacement plots of FIGS. 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19.

In the FIGS. 1-8, the arms 32, 34 as well as the knee bent 33 and contacting tip 35 are depicted as having constant cross sections. Nevertheless, arms 32, 34, knee bent 33 and contacting tip 35 may have tuned configurations to provide a scrub motion predetermined in direction and magnitude in response to a contacting force exerted onto the contacting face 36 during operational contacting of the probe 1 with a test contact as is well known in the art. Such tuned configurations and their influence on the scrub motion are described in more detail under FIGS. 9-18.

Referring to FIGS. 2, 3, multiple representations of probe 1 may be arrayed with a first pitch PX that is substantially smaller than the total width WT. Base and reverse angles AB, AR are selected such that for a given first pitch PX sufficient base arm clearance BC and reverse arm clearance RC is established for an unimpeded deflection of each suspension knee 3 within the array. The first pitch PX may be selected in conjunction with the column width CW such that a first gap GX remains at a minimum required for an assembly for the arrayed probes 1.

Multiple representations of probe 1 may be arrayed in a two dimensional probe array 10 with the first pitch PX in a preferred direction parallel to the probes' 1 knee axes KA and a second pitch PY preferably perpendicular to the first pitch PX. The second pitch PY may be selected in conjunction with the probe thickness TH such that a second gap GY remains at a minimum required for an assembly for the arrayed probes 1. Providing the probes 1 in a configuration for a sole assembly via their rigid columnar structures 2 and for a scrub motion predetermined in direction and magnitude is highly advantageous for a tight interlaced array of the probes 1. For example, probes 1 having a probe thickness TH of about 2 mils, a total width WT of about 8 mils and a column width CW of about 2 mils may be assembled with a first pitch PX of about 4 mils and a second pitch of about 3 mils.

Referring to FIGS. 4-7, the probes 1 may be fixedly held in a probe assembly 100 including fixture plates 4 that may be combined and/or part of a well known probe apparatus for testing electronic circuitry. Each fixture plate 4 has a number of fixing cutouts 41 with a contour larger than the rectangular cross section of the columnar structure 2. Each fixing cutout 41 has two fixing faces 411, 412 that correspond to the first pair of adjacent faces 24, 25. The probe assembly further includes a clamping plate 5 having a number of clamping cutouts 51 also with a contour larger than the rectangular cross section of the columnar structure 2. Each clamping cutout 51 has two clamping faces 511, 512 that correspond to the second pair of adjacent faces 23, 26. Fixing cutouts 41 and clamping cutouts 51 are fabricated into their respective plates 4, 5 with pitches PX and PY.

The clamping plate may be held with respect to the fixture plates 4 in an assembly position as seen in FIGS. 4, 5 and a clamping position as seen in FIGS. 6, 7. In the assembly position, the clamping cutouts 51 align with the fixing cutouts 41 such that a columnar structure 2 may be inserted in the fixing cutouts 41 and the clamping cutouts 51. In the clamping position, the clamping plate 51 is offset in a clamp direction DC relative to its assembly position. The clamp direction DC is in a clamp angle AC which preferably corresponds approximately with a diagonal between the enclosed edges of the first pair of adjacent faces 24, 25 and the second pair of adjacent faces 23, 26. As a result of the angled clamping offset, the first pair of adjacent faces 24, 25 is forced into snuggle contact with the fixing faces 411, 412 and the second pair of adjacent faces 23, 26 is forced into snuggle contact with the clamping faces 511, 512 such that each probe is fixedly held in a predetermined pitch and orientation with respect to the fixture plates 4 and with respect to each other.

Plates 4, 5 may be fabricated from ceramic with the cutouts 41, 51 being deep trench etched as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The clamping plate 5 may be forced into the clamping offset via any well known mechanical feature such as a screw pressing against a clamping access feature 55. The clamping direction DC is self adjusting as long as the clamping force is applied in

direction approximately complying with the predetermined clamping direction DC as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The clamping plate 5 may be actuated without particular guides. Assembly position stoppers may be provided for the clamping plate to warrant alignment of the clamping cutouts 51 with the fixing cutouts 41 in assembly position. Positioning of the probes 1 in direction along the column height CH may be provided via an auxiliary stop plate (not shown) temporarily placed adjacent opposite an insertion side of the plate assembly such that the peripheral ends 21 contact the stop plate once fully inserted into the cutouts 41, 51. After clamping, the stop plate may be removed. The probes 1 may be bonded in clamped position by an epoxy or other well known techniques. The cutouts 41, 51 may also be configured as conductively coated via holes conductively connected to peripheral terminals on the plates 41, and/or 51. The probes 1 may also be conductively accessed via well known wire bonding techniques bonding wires to the peripheral ends 21 as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The fully fabricated probe assembly 100 may be inserted and/or assembled in a well known probe apparatus.

To facilitate the assembly of large numbers of probes 1, a number of probes 1 may be simultaneously fabricated as a probe comb 11 as is exemplarily illustrated in FIG. 8. The probe comb 11 is held together by a probe bridge 6 connected to each of the arrayed probes' 1 peripheral end 21. A number of probe combs 11 may be stacked with second pitch PY in protrusion direction of the probe comb 11, forming large two dimensional probe arrays. Individual probe combs 11 may be spaced apart by spacers that provide second gaps GY. The probe combs 11 may be held in alignment along second pitch PY direction by surrounding frame structures and/or by form features on both sides of the spacers. The form features may fit into the gaps GX. The probe combs 11 may alternately be assembled by inserting them with their probe bridges 6 in correspondingly shaped grooves of a template plate (not shown).

After the probe combs 11 are positioned with respect to each other, they may be fixed by use of a resin filled into the gaps between the probes 1. After curing of the resin, the probe bridges 6 may be removed and the individual probes 1 conductively accessed as described above.

Suspension connect 31, base arm 32, knee bent 33, reverse arm 34, and contacting tip 35 may have various tuned configurations resulting in varying scrub motions. Referring to FIGS. 9-13 a first tuned configuration is described in which a lateral scrub motion with respect to the tip axis TA is substantially zero. In FIGS. 9-19, numerals pertaining to the deflected elements of the suspension knee 3 have a suffix letter D, whereas numerals pertaining to non deflected elements of the suspension knee 3 have a suffix letter N. A contacting force resulting from the operative approach of the contacting tip 35 on a test contact 210 (see FIGS. 20, 21) may act upon the contacting face 36N/36D along the tip axis TA. Where the tip axis TA crosses the base arm 32N/32D, the base arm 32N/32D has its local bending stresses at a minimum as can be seen in the spectral stress plots of FIGS. 11, 13 and 15, 18. At these low stress regions LS, LSN/LSN, the central base arm portion 321D has its maximum angular central base arm deflection DAB1 with respect to the central base arm portion's 321N natural orientation and the peripheral base arm portion 322D has its maximum angular peripheral base arm deflection DAB2 with respect to the peripheral base arm portion's 322N natural orientation. This is, because a first bending momentum acting on the central base arm portion 321N/321D is

opposing a second bending momentum acting on the peripheral base arm portion 322N/322D. According to FIG. 9, the first bending momentum and the second bending momentum act counter clock wise or generally speaking in a direction away from the upper portion of the column axis CA. The first bending momentum hinges thereby on the suspension connect 31 and the second bending momentum hinges on the knee bent 33.

A third bending momentum acts on the reverse arm 34N/34D hinging on the knee bent 33 generally in direction opposite the second bending momentum. According to FIGS. 10, 11, the third bending momentum acts clock wise. First, second and third bending momentums result from the contacting force as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The third bending momentum results in a maximum angular reverse arm deflection DAR with respect to the reverse arm's 34N natural orientation.

The first tuned configuration includes dimensional and structural configurations of suspension connect 31, central base arm portion 321, peripheral base arm portion 322, knee bent 33 and reverse arm 34 such that maximum local angular deflections DAB1, DAB2 and DAR are substantially equal. An indication for the first tuned configuration is that the natural knee axis KAN of the non deflected suspension knee 3 is substantially parallel to the deflected knee axis KAD of the operationally deflected suspension knee 3.

During deflection of the central base arm portion 321N/321D a lateral offset NOF may be introduced to the remainder of the suspension knee 3 due to the geometric conditions and geometric relations of the deflected and non deflected central base arm portion 321N/321D as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The contacting tip 35 may be configured in length and deflection behavior such that the lateral offset NOF may be substantially compensated for. At the contacting face 36D, the contacting tip 35D may consequently have a maximum angular tip deflection DAT contributing to the scrub motion. Hence, in the first tuned configuration, the scrub motion includes substantially only angular movement of the contacting face 36.

For a required contacting force, the operational deflection of the suspension knee 3 may be adjusted by configuring the elements of the suspension knee 3 for a leveled stress maxima as can be seen in the FIGS. 12, 13. There, the cross sections are adjusted with continuous thickness TH such that stress maxima propagate highly continuous along suspension connect 31, central and peripheral base arm portions 321, 322, knee bent 33, reverse arm 34 and contacting tip 35. Optimizing the suspension knee 3 with constant thickness TH is particularly preferred in combination with continuous profile of probe 1 and fabrication techniques layered in profile direction such as well known electroplating in combination with a negative mask corresponding to the contour of the probe's 1 continuous profile. Nevertheless, the suspension knee 3 may also be optimized by varying the thickness TH as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art.

Referring to FIGS. 14-16, a second tuned configuration of the suspension knee 3 provides a scrub motion in direction towards the column axis CA. According to FIGS. 14 and 15, the second tuned configuration may be provided for a continuously shaped base arm 32 by extending the reverse arm 34 such that the tip axis TA divides the base arm into a central base arm portion 321 that is shorter than the peripheral base arm portion 322. Consequently, the maximum angular deflection DAB1 of central arm portion 321D is smaller than the maximum angular deflection DAB2 of the peripheral arm portion 322D. Since base arm 32 and reverse

11

arm **34** have substantially equal and continuous cross sections, DAB2 is equal DAR. The summary of DAB1, DAB2 and DAR results generally in a tilt of the displaced knee axis KAD in direction away from the upper portion of the column axis CA. With respect to FIGS. **14** and **16**, the displaced knee axis KAD is tilted in clockwise direction with respect to the natural non deflected knee axis KAN. The resulting lateral scrub motion is in direction towards the central axis CA. FIG. **15** depicts the corresponding stresses.

The same condition of DAB1 being smaller than DAM with DAB2 being equal DAR is depicted in FIG. **16**. There, the central base arm portion **321** is configured with larger bending stiffness than the peripheral base arm portion **322**. Even though the tip axis TA is at a distance to CA equal to the above described first tuned condition of FIGS. **9-13**, the dissimilar structural configuration of both base arm portions **321**, **322** is the prevailing condition determining the direction and magnitude of the scrub motion.

The teachings of FIGS. **14-16** may be inverted to obtain a third tuned configuration in which the scrub motion is in a direction away from the central axis CA as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. Accordingly and as shown in FIGS. **17**, **18**, the suspension knee **3** is configured with the tip axis TA dividing the base arm **32** in a central base arm portion **321** that is longer than the peripheral base arm portion **322**. Despite continuous cross sections of base arm **32** and reverse arm **34**, DAB1 being larger than DAB2 results in a scrub motion away from the central axis CA irrespective of DAB2 being equal DAR, which is illustrated in FIG. **17** by the deflected knee axis KAD being rotated in counter clockwise direction with respect to the natural knee axis KAN or generally speaking, in the third tuned configuration the deflected knee axis KAD is rotated with respect to the natural knee axis KAN in direction towards the upper portion of the column axis CA.

Second or third tuned configuration may be obtained also by adjusting the reverse arm's **34** deflection behavior in conjunction with the peripheral base arm portion's **322** deflection behavior as illustrated in FIG. **19**. There, the base arm portions **321**, **322** are configured with equal deflection behavior such that DAB1 equals DAB2. The reverse arm **34** on the other hand is stiffer than the peripheral arm portion **322** resulting in DAR being smaller than DAB2 and consequently a third tuned configuration with a linear scrub motion away from the central axis CA. In case, the reverse arm **34** would be less stiff than the peripheral base arm portion **322**, the second tuned configuration would be established with the linear scrub motion towards the central axis CA.

As may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art, the teachings presented under the FIGS. **9-19** may be well applied to configure various shapes of the suspension knee's **3** elements. Further more, the contacting force represented in the Figures by the tip axis TA may be adjusted in angle with respect to the column axis CA. Consequently, for a given geometry of the suspension knee **3**, first, second or third tuned configuration may be provided by assembling the probe **1** with its column axis CA in predetermined angle with respect to the contacting force defined by the probe apparatus in conjunction with the test contact **210** (see FIGS. **20**, **21**) as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. For example, the probe **1** may be provided with a first tuned configuration in case of the tip axis TA being parallel to the column axis CA. Tilting such probe **1** in direction towards its knee **33** may result in a second tuned configuration whereas a tilting of such probe **1** in direction away from its knee **33** may result in a third tuned configuration. Tilting the

12

probe **1** may be a convenient technique of fine tuning the linear scrub motion in direction and magnitude without need to remanufacture the probe **1**.

As taught under FIGS. **9-19**, scrub motion may be adjusted for its lateral movement component in direction and, magnitude and for its angular movement component in magnitude as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The advantageous combination of angular and lateral scrub motion adjustability may be combined with a multi-radius contacting face **38** as illustrated in FIGS. **20**, **21**. The multi-radius contacting face **38** may have at least a first contacting radius R381 at the initial contacting region **381** where the multi-radius face **38** initially contacts the test contact **210** of a tested electronic device **210**. An initial tip axis TA1 may origin in the initial contacting region **381**.

As the probe **1** is brought into operational deflection with respect to the test contact **210**, the multi-radius face **38** may be rotated with maximum tip deflection angle DAT such that an operational contacting region **382** comes into contact with the test contact **210**. An operational tip axis TA2 may origin from the central interface between operational contacting region **382** and the test contact **210**. Between initial contacting at scrub start location SS and operational contacting, the multi-radius face **38** prescribes a lateral scrub SL and an angular scrub equal DAT. Orientation of TA1 and TA2 may be affected by friction in the tip/contact interface CI as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art.

The operational contacting region **382** has second contacting radius R382 substantially larger than first contacting radius R381. The multi-radius face **38** hence features at least two radii R381, R382 that contribute to a smooth and continuously curvature of the multi-radius face **38**. The two radii R381, R382 may be selected in conjunction with the change of contacting force as a function of angular tip displacement such that contacting pressure in the tip/contact interface CI remains within a predetermined limit.

Multiple Layered Probes

Referring to FIG. **22**, area of and pressure in the tip/contact interface CI may also be adjusted by varying the contacting face thickness FT to levels less than the probe thickness TH. Also, the contacting tip **35** may be split into tip segments **351**, **352**, **353** of which one or more may provide contacting face(s) **36** or **38**. For that purpose, the probe **1** may be fabricated from a number of layers L1, L2, L3 deposited in multiple steps for example by electroplating in combination with multiple masks as may be well appreciated by anyone skilled in the art. The layers L1, L2, L3 may partially and/or fully extend across the probe's **1** profile contour and may be made of materials suitable for their particular task. For example, the layer L2 illustrated in FIG. **22** with the contacting face **36** may be fabricated from a material specifically suitable for probe tips such as rhodium. A single contacting face **36** or **38** may be placed centrally as shown in FIG. **22**. Alternatively, dual contacting faces **36** or **38** may be provided by tip segments **351**, **353**, one adjacent the front face **25** and the other adjacent the back face **26**. This may also assist in stabilizing the suspension knee's **3** deflection behavior within the symmetry plane SP and to reduce the risk of inadvertent lateral scrub motion deviations.

The contacting tips **351**, **352**, **353** may be arranged in a tripod like fashion with each contacting segment having a contacting face **36** or **38** for providing a self centering contacting on a test contact in the well known spherical configuration. The suspension knee **3** may be layered in direction along the symmetry plane SP. The layer configuration may also be adjusted in view of low surface resistance

13

for high frequency current flow from the contacting tip **36** or **38** to the peripheral end **21** or the column **2**. Tip segments **351**, **352** and **353** may also be fabricated from same material resulting in a monolithic structure.

The spectral plots of FIGS. **10-19** are generated with a commercially available FEA software.

Probes with a Shank and a Knee

Referring to FIG. **23a**, a “first contact” probe configuration is illustrated according to an embodiment of the invention. FIG. **23b** shows a corresponding operational probe configuration. Here “first contact” refers to the situation where a probe is in contact with a contact pad, but no contact force is applied. In contrast, an operational probe configuration makes contact with the contact pad with a predetermined contact force. Since the probe deforms in response to the contact force, the shape of the probe differs in the two cases. In particular, how the probe moves from the first contact configuration to the operational configuration is a key aspect of the invention.

A probe **2300** includes a shank **2302**, a knee section **2304** and a probe tip **2306** as parts of a single structure, as shown. Shank **2302** is straight and does not deflect appreciably during contact, so it is convenient to regard shank **2302** as defining a probe axis **2310** with which it is aligned. Knee section **2304** extends from shank **2302** to probe tip **2306**, and includes two parts. A first part of knee section **2304** starts at shank **2302** and extends outward from probe axis **2310** to reach a knee point **2312**. Knee point **2312** is a point of maximum separation from probe axis **2310**. A second part of knee section **2304** starts at knee point **2312** and extends to a tip location **2314**, such that probe axis **2310** is between knee point **2312** and tip location **2314**. A lateral tip offset **2316** is thereby defined between the probe tip and the probe axis. Probe tip **2306** is in contact with a contact pad **2320** defining a contact point **2324**.

Thus knee section **2304** can be regarded as extending outward for a certain distance *D* (the first part) and then curving back for a distance greater than *D* (the second part), thereby establishing the lateral offset **2316**. The present inventor has found that this probe configuration can provide improved probing performance. For comparison, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/850,921 by the present inventor considers a knee probe having a knee which curves back by a distance less than *D* (i.e., it does not overshoot the probe axis).

FIG. **23b** shows the corresponding operational probe configuration for the example of FIG. **23a**. Here contact pad **2320** is moved toward probe shank **2302** by a vertical displacement **2330**. Equivalently, a predetermined contact force is applied to the probe shank. For any particular probe design, there is a one to one relation (i.e., this relation is a mathematical function, which can be linear or nonlinear) between vertical displacement and contact force, as is well known in the art, so both ways of describing the operational configuration are employed interchangeably in the following description. Probe **2300** deforms under the contact force, and FIG. **23b** shows key parameters of this deformation. More specifically, contact point **2324'** on FIG. **23b** is farther from probe axis **2310** than the corresponding contact point **2324** on FIG. **23a**. Thus the probe tip slides along the contact pad for a certain distance (i.e., the difference between **2316'** and **2316** on FIGS. **23a-b**). In addition to this sliding motion, the probe tip also “rocks” relative to the contact pad. This rocking motion can be more clearly appreciated by defining a “tip axis” **2318** on FIG. **23a** which is required to be parallel to probe axis **2310** and which passes through the contact point **2324**. In the operational configuration of FIG. **23b**, tip

14

axis **2318** is no longer parallel to probe axis **2310**. The angle between tip axis **2318** and probe axis **2310** on FIG. **23b** is a measure of the amount of rocking motion provided.

Thus the scrub motion provided in this example includes both a sliding motion of the probe tip relative to the contact pad, and a rocking motion of the probe tip relative to the contact pad. A key aspect of the invention is that parameters of the scrub motion (e.g., slide length and rocking angle) can be predetermined, in part, by geometrical parameters of the probe and by the predetermined contact force (or equivalently, predetermined vertical displacement). More explicitly, a probing method according to the invention includes: providing a probe having the general configuration of FIG. **23a** (i.e., having a knee section with an overshoot), making contact between the probe tip and a device under test, and applying a predetermined contact force to the probe shank, thereby providing a predetermined scrub motion of the probe tip on the contact pad. The scrub motion is predetermined in part by the contact force and by geometrical parameters of the probe.

The friction provided by the contact pad is also a relevant factor for determining the scrub motion, so probe designs and/or methods will typically need to account for variations in contact pad friction. The speed with which contact is made has also been found to be relevant. More specifically, the sliding motion length on the contact pad (also referred to as scrub length) tends to decrease as the relative contact velocity between probe tip and contact pad increases. Another method of further controlling the scrub length is by laterally moving the probe as contact is made. Lateral probe motion in the direction of the tip offset will increase the scrub length, and lateral probe motion in the opposite direction will decrease the scrub length. Such lateral probe motion can be provided by appropriate motion control of a chuck holding the probe (or probes), or by appropriate motion control of a stage holding the device under test. Further scrub length control can be provided by controlling relative velocity and/or lateral probe motion. Scrub length can be measured after probing has occurred by measuring the length of the mark left by the probe on the contact pad. Such measurements are important for verifying proper probe performance.

A scrub motion including both a sliding motion and a rocking motion has provided improved results in practice. Investigations indicate that the sliding motion acts to scrape non-conductive material from the contact pad to create an exposed area of the contact pad, and the rocking motion acts to bring a clean part of the probe tip into contact with the freshly exposed area of the contact pad. From FIGS. **23a-b**, it is apparent that the rocking motion causes a different point of the probe tip to be in contact with the contact pad in the operational configuration than in the “first contact” configuration. Providing a scrub motion including both of these motions is therefore preferred.

Suitable materials for probe **2300** and probe tip **2306** are well known in the art, and any such materials can be employed in practicing the invention. Suitable tip materials are electrically conductive and wear-resistant, and include Rh and Cr.

Detailed design work in accordance with the above-identified principles of the invention has led to a point design as well as identification of some preferred parameter ranges. A point design for making contact to Cu or Al contact pads (or flat topped columns) has a tip offset (**2316** on FIG. **23a**) of approximately 0 to 0.3 mm and preferably approximately 0.1 to 0.2 mm and more preferably approximately 0.18 mm, a knee offset (distance between knee point **2312** and probe

15

axis **2310** on FIG. **23a**) of approximately 0 to 0.7 mm and preferably approximately 0.1 to 0.5 mm and more preferably approximately 0.31 mm, and a probe length (combined length of probe tip and knee section in Z direction on FIG. **23a**) of approximately 0 to 5 mm and more preferably approximately 1 to 3 mm and more preferably approximately 1.95 mm. In this point design, the probe width is approximately 0 to 0.2 mm and more preferably approximately 0.05 to 0.1 mm and more preferably approximately 0.076 mm, and the probe material is Nickel-Cobalt alloy. The tip offset is preferably in a range from about 0.05 mm to about 0.25 mm. The knee offset is preferably in a range from about 0.05 mm to about 0.5 mm. The probe length is preferably between about 0.5 mm and about 3.0 mm.

For a configuration with a small knee offset and large tip offset one can expect a longer scrub length. For a configuration with large knee offset and small tip offset, a shorter scrub length is expected. Large contact friction requires a probe design that generates larger horizontal reaction force typically produced with larger scrub length. Smoother, less frictional contact pad surfaces require a probe design producing a shorter scrub length.

As indicated above, for any particular probe, there is a predetermined relation between contact force and vertical deflection. As the probe stiffness increases, the amount of contact force required for a given vertical deflection increases. A typical vertical deflection in practice is about 75 μm (i.e. about 3 mils), and for this amount of deflection, the contact force is preferably between about 0.025 N and about 0.15 N (i.e., about 2.5 to 15 grams force), and is more preferably between about 0.08 N and about 0.10 N (i.e., about 8 to 10 grams force). The vertical deflection during contact is preferably between about 12 μm and about 125 μm and is more preferably between about 50 μm and about 75 μm .

Another way to describe probing according to the invention is in terms of parameters of the scrub mark left on the contact pad by the probe. The scrub mark width is preferably between about 3.0 μm and about 15.0 μm and is more preferably about 7 μm wide. The scrub mark depth is preferably between about 0.1 μm and about 2.0 μm and is more preferably about 0.6 μm . FIG. **29** shows an example of a measured scrub mark depth profile. The scrub mark length is preferably between about 3.0 μm and about 44.0 μm and is more preferably about 10 μm . This description of scrub marks assumes Al or Cu contact pads.

FIG. **24** shows a close up view of a probe tip in contact with a contact pad. More specifically, probe tip **2306** makes contact with contact pad **2320** on a circuit (or device) **2402**. Note that the view of FIG. **24** (and of FIGS. **25** and **26**) differs from the view of FIGS. **23a-b** by a 90 degree rotation about the Z-axis. Thus moving left or right on FIGS. **24-26** corresponds to moving into or out of the page of FIG. **23**.

Probes with a Skate

FIG. **25** shows an alternative embodiment of the invention, where probe tip **2306** includes multiple layers (one of which is shown as **2502** and another of which is shown as **2504**). Such a multilayer probe configuration provides several advantages. First, as shown on FIG. **25**, one of the layers (**2504** in this example) can extend past the others, thereby defining a "skate" having a width (i.e., y extent) substantially less than the width of probe tip **2306**. Reducing the probe contact area can enhance scrub motion performance, because the force per unit area is thereby increased. However, decreasing the width of the entire probe can undesir-

16

ably allow the probe to deflect in the y direction. A probe tip with a skate, as shown in FIG. **25**, allows most of the probe to have a y-thickness sufficient to render y-deflection negligible, while also desirably reducing the contact area.

A further advantage of the multi-layer skate configuration of FIG. **25** is that only the skate layer (i.e., layer **2504**) should be a material selected for suitability as a tip contacting material. The remaining layers (e.g., **2502**) can be selected to optimize the overall probe performance without regard for their suitability as tip materials, since they never actually make contact with contact pad **2320**.

FIG. **26** shows a dual-skate configuration, where probe tip **2306** includes two skates **2602** and **2604**. This dual skate configuration is suitable for probing a contact pad **2320** having a dimple **2606** at its center. Such a dimple is characteristic of contact pads formed by metal plating (e.g. as in flip-chip wafers). Typical dimple dimensions are about 10 μm diameter on a contact pad having a 110 μm diameter, with the size of the dimple depending on the pitch of the contact pads. A single skate configuration as in FIG. **25** will undesirably require a choice between probing at the dimple location (which can degrade the electrical contact made by the probe), or off-center probing (which can be difficult to align). Probing at the dimple can also cause high mechanical stress on the probe if the probe tip gets caught by the dimple. In contrast, the dual-skate approach of FIG. **26** avoids probing the dimple, but still has the probe tip centered on the contact, thereby simplifying automatic probe alignment.

FIGS. **27a-b** show results from an embodiment of the invention. More specifically, FIG. **27a** is a photograph of a probe tip and FIG. **27b** is a picture of the probe tip of FIG. **27a** after 1,000,000 probing cycles according to the invention. The probe of this example is a multi-layer single-skate configuration, as in FIG. **25**. FIG. **27b** shows no significant degradation of the probe tip, either by wear or by accumulation of debris.

FIGS. **28a-d** are photographs of a probe array suitable for practicing the invention. Such arrays are often required in practice, since many circuits being tested have a large number of contact pads which must be probed. For probe arrays, it is important that each probe deform in a uniform and predictable manner when the contact force is applied, to prevent probe-to-probe contact resulting from probe deflection. Thus it is preferred for the probe configuration of FIGS. **23a-b** to only deform in the X-Z plane responsive to the contact force, as also indicated above in connection with probe tip skates.

Probes with Variable Thickness

FIG. **30** shows a probe **3000** according to an embodiment of the invention. A shank **3002** defines a probe axis **3016**. A curved knee section **3004** is connected to shank **3002** and includes an upper knee section **3006** and a lower knee section **3008**. A probe tip **3012** is connected to an end of knee section **3004** opposite from the shank. Upper knee section **3006** extends outward from shank **3002** and reaches a knee point **3010** of maximum separation from probe axis **3016**, thereby defining a lateral knee offset **3018** from the probe axis. Lower knee section **3008** extends from knee point **3010** toward probe axis **3016** and to a tip location **3014**, thereby defining a lateral tip offset **3020** from the probe axis.

A probe plane includes and is thereby defined by probe axis **3016** and knee point **3010**. In this example, the plane of FIG. **30** is the probe plane. A thickness of upper knee section **3006** in the probe plane varies along the length of the upper knee section according to a thickness function $h(z)$, where z is position along the probe. The upper knee section includes

a reduced thickness section, as described above. More specifically, $h(z)$ has a local minimum located between shank **3002** and knee point **3010**, as shown in the example of FIG. **30**.

Suitable materials for shank **3002**, knee section **3004** and probe tip **3012** are well known in the art, and any such materials can be employed in practicing the invention. Suitable tip materials are electrically conductive and wear-resistant, and include Rh and Cr. Known probe fabrication methods are applicable for fabricating embodiments of the invention. These methods include, but are not limited to, standard multi-layer metal deposition techniques such as plating, sputtering, photolithographic techniques and micro-electromechanical systems (MEMS) techniques. No unusual fabrication difficulties due to the reduced thickness section arise in fabricating probes according to the invention.

Preferably, $h(z)$ varies smoothly (i.e., $h(z)$ is preferably continuous with a continuous first derivative) to avoid stress concentration at discontinuities and/or sharp corners of $h(z)$. It is also preferred for the minimum probe thickness (i.e., the local minimum of $h(z)$) to have a value between about $0.5 h_{nom}$ and about $0.95 h_{nom}$, where h_{nom} is a nominal in-plane probe thickness. In some cases (e.g., as on FIG. **30**), lower probe section **3008** has a roughly constant thickness h_1 , and in such cases, h_{nom} can equal h_1 . In other cases, the nominal probe thickness h_{nom} can be taken to be the maximum value of $h(z)$ (i.e., the maximum thickness of the upper knee section). In either of these two cases, the nominal in-plane probe thickness h_{nom} is typically between about $25 \mu\text{m}$ and about $55 \mu\text{m}$, although the invention can also be practiced outside of this thickness range.

Preferably, $h(z)$ varies smoothly along the entire length of upper knee section **3006**, in order to minimize stress concentration for a given minimum thickness. It is also preferred for the probe thickness perpendicular to the probe plane to be somewhat higher than the nominal in-plane probe thickness, so that deformation of the probe is easiest in the probe plane. More specifically, the out of plane thickness is preferably between about $1.1 h_{nom}$ and about $1.5 h_{nom}$.

For a configuration with a small knee offset and large tip offset one can expect a longer scrub length. For a configuration with large knee offset and small tip offset, a shorter scrub length is expected. Preferred probe design approaches depend on the friction between probe and contact pad. For large contact friction, probe designs that generate larger horizontal reaction force typically produced with larger scrub length are preferred. For smoother, less frictional contact pad surfaces, probe designs producing a shorter scrub length are preferred.

Preferably, the reduced thickness section is in the upper knee section as shown and described above, although the invention can also be practiced by having the reduced thickness section anywhere along the length of knee section **3004**. Placing the reduced thickness section in the upper knee section tends to decrease scrub motion without appreciably decreasing the contact force, while placing the reduced thickness section in the lower knee section (e.g., as shown on FIG. **38**) tends to decrease both scrub motion and contact force. More specifically, a negative tip offset probe having an upper knee section reduced thickness section tends to rotate toward the knee during deflection, thereby decreasing scrub motion. A probe having a lower knee section reduced thickness section tends to have increased flexibility (which reduces contact force). This reduced horizontal scrubbing force decreases the scrub motion. Probes having multiple reduced thickness sections can also be

employed (e.g., one being in the upper knee section and the other being in the lower knee section) in practicing the invention.

As described above, the invention is applicable to probes having a positive tip offset, a negative tip offset, or no tip offset. The example of FIG. **30** shows a probe having a negative tip offset. Here probe axis **3016** is between knee point **3010** and tip location **3014**. FIG. **31** shows an embodiment of the invention having no tip offset. Here tip location **3014** is substantially on probe axis **3016**. FIG. **32** shows an embodiment of the invention having a positive tip offset. Here tip location **3014** is between probe axis **3016** and knee point **3010**. For the probe of FIG. **32**, the knee section does not cross the probe axis.

Reduced thickness sections of probes according to the invention can be regarded as resulting from removing material from the left and/or right sides of a smooth, constant-thickness probe profile. For example, FIG. **33** shows an embodiment of the invention where the reduced thickness section is formed by variation of a right probe boundary $f_2(z)$. FIG. **34** shows an embodiment of the invention where the reduced thickness section is formed by variation of a left probe boundary $f_1(z)$. FIG. **30** shows an embodiment of the invention where the reduced thickness section is formed by variation of both a left probe boundary $f_1(z)$ and a right probe boundary $f_2(z)$.

In the preceding examples, lower knee section **3008** has a roughly constant in-plane thickness. The detailed shape of lower knee section **3008** is not critical in practicing the invention, and any other lower knee section shape can also be employed in practicing the invention. For example, FIG. **35** shows an embodiment of the invention having a tapered lower knee section **3008**. More specifically, the in-plane thickness of lower knee section **3008** decreases monotonically along the length of the lower knee section from knee point **3010** to the tip location **3014**.

Operation of the invention can be appreciated in connection with FIGS. **36-37**, which show an embodiment of the invention in an initial contact configuration and an operating contact configuration respectively. On FIG. **36** a probe according to the invention makes initial contact with a contact pad **3604**. It is convenient to describe the initial contact point between the probe and contact pad **3604** in terms of an initial contact offset **3608** defined with respect to probe axis **3016**. In operation, the arrangement of FIG. **36** is vertically compressed (e.g., by moving contact pad **3604** up by a vertical deflection **3606**). Under this compression, the probe elastically deforms as schematically shown on FIG. **37**. As a result of this deformation, the probe tip moves relative to contact pad **3604**. Typically this relative motion includes a translation (i.e., operating contact offset **3608'** being different from initial contact offset **3608**) and a rocking motion of the probe tip relative to the contact pad surface. The rocking motion can be appreciated by noting the different orientations of a tip axis **3602** on FIGS. **36** and **37**. The scrub mark length is the difference between offset **3608** and offset **3608'**.

In one example, a reference probe (probe A) having a nominal in-plane probe thickness of $52 \mu\text{m}$ and a negative tip offset (as shown on FIG. **30**), provided a $25 \mu\text{m}$ scrub length on an Al surface for $75 \mu\text{m}$ vertical deflection. A probe according to the invention (probe B) had the same shape as the reference probe, except that the upper knee section of probe B smoothly varied to provide a local minimum thickness of $33 \mu\text{m}$ in the upper knee section. This local minimum was located about halfway between the knee point and the shank. The thickness variation of the upper knee

19

section was distributed over the entire length of the upper knee section. Probe B provided a 10 μm scrub length on the same Al surface used for testing probe A. For both probes A and B, the contact force was about the same (2 grams per 25 μm vertical deflection).

FIG. 39 illustrates another embodiment of the present invention comprising layered probe 3800. Layered probe 3800 of this embodiment preferably comprises at least two inner layers 3806, 3808 and two outer layers 3802, 3804. The layers can be the same or different materials. For example, layer 3806 can comprise Cu and layers 3802, 3804, and 3808 can comprise Rd or Cr. Segments along the length of the probe in FIG. 39 can be different material structures. One of the inner layers 3806 is preferably shaped like a C, although other shapes may be employed wherein one inner layer partially or fully surrounds the other inner layer. This embodiment of the present invention allows at least one of the inner layers to comprise a more conductive material than the outer layers.

Layered Probes with Core

Arrays of closely-spaced probes have been extensively used for IC testing for many years. As integrated circuit technology progresses, circuit dimensions decrease, and it becomes desirable to probe at ever-decreasing spacings between probe pads. To keep up with this evolution, probe dimensions also tend to decrease as technology progresses. However, new technical problems can arise as probe dimensions are reduced.

One such new problem relates to probe current carrying capacity (CCC). Present day and projected probe dimensions are sufficient to provide normal device operating currents (on the order of 100 mamps) without compromising probe mechanical integrity. However, integrated circuits that are probed do not always operate normally, and probing a faulty circuit (e.g., a short) can lead to a current flow of about 2 amps or more through a probe.

Accordingly, this behavior can be characterized by measuring contact force as a function of current, and looking for irreversible changes in contact force as a result of high current operation. The probe current carrying capacity (CCC) can be defined as the maximum current at which no irreversible deformation of the probe occurs during normal mechanical over-travel.

Probes suitable for probing contact pads having relatively large spacing (e.g., earlier stage IC technology) naturally tended to have sufficiently large dimensions that probing a faulty circuit would not lead to probe damage. However, present day and projected IC contact pad spacings will require small probe dimensions and thus insufficient probe current carrying capacity becomes a pressing problem.

In embodiments of the present invention, two approaches alleviate this problem. Both approaches rely on introducing materials into the probes having a higher degree of electrical conductivity than typical probe materials, without compromising the mechanical performance of the probes. Increased electrical conductivity reduces resistive heating of the probes, thereby increasing the probe CCC.

Referring to FIG. 40, one embodiment of the present invention comprises multi-layer probe structure 4000 where layers 4002 are preferably in the plane of probe deformation. Layers 4002 are preferably planar. Layers 4002 preferably comprise NiCo. Central or core layer 4004 of probe structure 4000 preferably comprises a high conductivity material (including, but not limited to, Cu), and at tip 4006 of probe structure 4000, a harder material (including, but not limited to Rd and/or Cr) is preferably used to make electrical contact to devices being probed. Methods for fabricating multi-layer

20

probe structure 4000 are employed for making these probes. For example, central or core layer 4004 is deposited as the high conductivity, low strength layer (e.g., Cu). Patterning and etching opens up space for tip 4006 regions of core layer 4004, and tip 4006 material is then deposited into these opened up spaces. Core layer 4004 and tip 4006 can be either the same thickness as illustrated in FIG. 40 or different thicknesses. Core layer 4004 and tip 4006 can be approximately 1 to 30 μm thick, and more preferably approximately 5 to 20 μm thick and most preferably approximately 8-12 (preferably about 10 μm) thick. Layers 4002 can be different thicknesses or the same thickness as illustrated in FIG. 40. Layers 4002 are preferably approximately 10 to 80 μm thick, and more preferably approximately 20 to 50 μm thick and most preferably approximately 30-35 (preferably about 33) μm thick.

The invention is further illustrated by the following non-limiting examples.

Example 1

Three probe embodiments of the present invention were evaluated for increased CCC. The three embodiments are illustrated in FIG. 41. Probe B comprises highly conductive core 4100, e.g. an approximately 10 micron Cu core. Probe A is the same as Probe B except that core layer 4102 is made of NiCo (i.e., probe A is all NiCo). Probe C is the same as Probe A, except that the outer surface comprises a highly conductive material, e.g. an approximately 3 micron thick Cu layer deposited on the outer surface of Probe C.

The Probe C embodiment showed unsatisfactory results because the Cu plating layer tended to crack in operational cycling tests, as seen in FIG. 42. Probe C cracked after 7 k/75 μm cycling. This cracking result can be better understood by considering the stress distribution in probe designs A, B, and C as illustrated in section view in FIG. 43. Regions 4300 on the plots of FIG. 43 show regions of high stress, and it is apparent that the Cu plating of probe C experiences high stress (see regions 4300 on outer edges of probe C), which when combined with the poor mechanical properties of Cu gives rise to the above identified cracking problem. Regions 4302 are low to no stress regions of probe designs A (region 4302 in center of probe), B (regions 4302 in center and left side of probe), and C (region 4302 in center of probe).

Example 2

Probe embodiments were further investigated by considering temperature and stress distributions within the probes. FIG. 44 illustrates an example of such investigations. Region 4402 illustrates the high-temperature and high-stress region of probe 4400. Regions 4404 illustrate low stress and low temperature regions of probe 4400. Frequently, as in the example of FIG. 44, the high-temperature and high-stress regions of a probe coincide and determine the CCC of the probe. In this case, region 4402 of probe 4400 determined the CCC of probe 4400.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the high-conductivity core in probe B of FIG. 41 is trimmed to remove some of its highest-stress material, as illustrated in FIG. 45. To compensate for the loss in electrical conductivity caused by this trimming, core layer 4500 can be made somewhat thicker. FIGS. 46-47 illustrate two probe embodiments that were compared. In probe B1, core 4600 is, for example, approximately 10 microns of Cu, and no trimming of core 4600 is performed. In probe B2, core 4602 is, for example, approximately 20 microns of Cu, and the high-

21

stress regions of core **4602** are trimmed away. The CCC of probe **B2** (about 1.25 amps) is higher than the CCC of probe **B1** (about 1.0 amp). Finite element analysis modeling, as employed above, is used to guide the configuration of further embodiments of the present invention comprising probes with highly conductive material. For example, the trimming of the high conductivity core can eliminate the regions of the core which are modeled as having stress that exceeds the yield strength of the conductivity core (at the relevant temperature).

Example 3

In the examples above, two approaches for improving probe CCC were considered. The preceding description relates to a first approach of including a high-conductivity layer in a multi-layer probe. In a second approach, a high conductivity layer is also included in the probe, but the geometry is significantly different. More specifically, as illustrated in FIG. **48**, high conductivity core **4802** (e.g., Cu) is vertical with respect to the overall layer structure of probe **4800**, as opposed to being horizontal as it was in the first two examples.

The significance of this difference is shown when comparing the orientation of the cores in FIGS. **45-47** to the orientation of the core in FIG. **48**. More specifically, the plane of probe deformation is horizontal in this geometry. When probe deformation occurs in this plane, the left side of the probe is in a state of compression and the right side of the probe is under tension (or vice versa). As a result of this stress pattern, the center of the probe is a neutral axis for stress, where stress is relatively low compared to other regions of the probe. This stress pattern is clearly visible in the calculated results shown in FIG. **43**. The point of core **4802** geometry shown in FIG. **48** is to align core **4802** with the neutral axis of probe stress. Thus the mechanically weak core material is placed in regions of the probe that experience the least stress, thereby improving probe CCC. In the example of FIG. **48**, a CCC of about 1.3 amps was obtained, and the mechanical stress in the Cu core was about 2 times less than it was in the probe A example considered above. Another preferred feature of the example of FIG. **48** is that core **4802** is completely surrounded by the mechanically stronger material.

Surrounding core **4802** is preferred, although not required, for chemical isolation from environment as well as for fabrication purposes. It is preferable to etch a shallow trench in a Ni—Co layer and fill it with Cu, than creating a separate “mold” in which Cu is plated. Also, encapsulating Cu with stronger metal/material adds mechanical robustness, particularly in cases when “slender” probes are employed.

Preferred fabrication processes can entail formation of separate vertical cores in two or more metal layers, thereby creating multi-core geometries as illustrated in FIGS. **49-51**. Such multi-core approaches can also be employed in connection with the horizontal geometry of FIGS. **46-47**. Referring to FIG. **49**, cores **4901** and **4903** are a part of metal layer **4902** and **4904**. Metal layer **4905** preferably caps core **4903**. Layer **4906** comprises the tip of probe **4900**. Referring to FIG. **50**, cores **5001** and **5003** are part of layers **5002** and **5004**. Layers **5005** and **5006** preferably cap cores **5001** and **5003**. Layer **5007** comprises the tip of probe **5000**. Referring to FIG. **51**, cores **5101**, **5103**, and **5105** are part of layers **5102**, **5104** and **5106**. Layer **5107** preferably caps core **5105**. Layer **5103** preferably comprises the tip of probe **5100**.

22

The use of a vertical probe core requires different processing steps than for probes that have only horizontal layers. Various approaches can be employed to provide a vertical probe core. For example, the central horizontal layer can be fabricated first; then patterning followed by etching can be used to open up space for the vertical core material. Selective deposition of the core material into this opened up space, followed by deposition of the top probe horizontal probe layer, can complete the structure.

Power/Ground Probes and Signal Probes

Embodiments of the present invention solve probe CCC issues as seen in practice. Contact pads on a device under test (DUT) (and the corresponding probes) can be divided into at least two categories, for example, power/ground pads and signal pads. Power/ground pads are for providing external power and ground connections to the IC, while the signal pads are for the IC inputs and outputs (I/O). Device failures that lead to high-current conditions at a pad tends to occur at power/ground pads, and not at signal pads. Power/ground pads are typically provided as several separate pads that are electrically connected to each other on-chip, and are contacted by separate probes (one for each pad) that are electrically connected to the relevant external power/ground. When a high-current device failure occurs for a set of power/ground pads, parasitic on-chip and off-chip resistances tend to force the high current to pass through a single one of the corresponding probes, which leads to a high risk of damage to the affected probe.

Based on these considerations, embodiments of the present invention address the probe CCC issues as follows:

1) At least two different kinds of probes are preferably employed in probing an IC—power/ground probes and signal probes. The power/ground probes are preferably larger in cross section than the signal probes. Preferably, the dimensions and shape of the power/ground probes are the same as for the signal probes, except that the width of the power/ground probes is a multiple of the width of the signal probes (e.g., 2x, 3x, etc.). An example of this geometry is shown in FIGS. **52A** and **52B**. FIG. **52A** illustrates a power/ground probe having a wide body as compared to the signal probe illustrated in FIG. **52B**. Certain features of such probes (e.g. the skates at the tips) preferably have a relatively small cross section, thus the current path through such sections is also short. In one embodiment of the present invention, the electrical resistance of the long current path that runs the length of the probe body is decreased by increasing the cross section area of the probe body.

2) A power/ground probe can make contact to multiple power/ground pads on a device under test. The wide body of the power/ground probe enables high CCC for power/ground probes. Since power/ground probes are preferably bussed, two or more bumps or skates can be bridged with one probe. Making such contact to multiple pads is a significant and surprising departure from the normally assumed requirement that each probe only contact a single pad. However, no problems arise by making such multiple pad contact if a power/ground probe makes contact to multiple pads that are all connected to the same IC power or ground line. Single probe to multiple pad connections as discussed herein are preferably all of this type (i.e., all of the pads contacted by any one probe are also electrically connected on-chip). The result of allowing for multiple-pad contact is that probe cross section dimensions are no longer under a hard constraint determined by the IC contact pad pitch (i.e. separation). This allows for the use of large probes as in the power/ground probe of FIG. **52A** even for small contact pad pitches.

23

In an embodiment of the present invention, a probe array comprises probes that have different cross sections (e.g. see FIG. 55). In this embodiment, it is possible for this non-uniformity to cause undesirable non-uniformity in probe life and/or performance. However, this problem can be avoided by providing a power/ground probe comprising a width that is a multiple of the width of a signal probe. The basic factor to consider is that probe elastic force scales linearly with probe width (e.g., if a power/ground probe has 3× the width of an otherwise similar signal probe, then the force it exerts in response to a deformation will be 3× that of the corresponding signal probe).

One situation where non-uniformity can be troublesome is when cleaning the tips of a probe array. Tip wear due to cleaning can be greater for the larger probes because of their greater contact force. FIG. 53 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention that minimizes tip wear. In this embodiment, probe tip 5300 preferably comprises sacrificial structure 5302 in addition to skates 5304 and 5306 at which contact on a contact pad is made. The width and/or materials of the sacrificial structure can be designed as needed to even out and/or slow probe wear due to cleaning. As seen in FIG. 54, sacrificial structure 5402 is in the center of tip 5400 and does not make contact to IC contact pads 5404. However, sacrificial structure 5402 can optionally make contact with IC contact pads 5404. Sacrificial structure 5402 can be located anywhere on the probe tip, but is preferably located in the center.

Another factor to consider is the desirability of having the same local contact force between probe and pad for each probe of a non-uniform probe array. One example for providing such contact uniformity is illustrated in FIGS. 55A and 55B. In this example, power/ground probe 5500 is about three times the width of signal probe 5502 width, and has triple skate 5504 on tip 5506 as opposed to single skate 5508 on signal probe 5502. With this example, the force per skate is about the same for both kinds of probes 5500 and 5502. Having the force per skate be about the same for all probes of a non-uniform probe array is beneficial because details of probe scrub motion tend to depend on the force per skate more than on the total force for the probe. Since contact pads of ICs tend to all be the same, it is preferred for each probe making contact to have the same scrub motion as contact is made. In the example of FIGS. 55A and 55B, power/ground probe 5500 is in mechanical contact with single contact pad 5510, and can be re-flow soldered to make electrical contact with other contact pads of the same IC power/ground line (e.g., the neighboring contact pads on the left and right of the wide probe). Also in the example of FIGS. 55A and 55B, only about one-third of the power/ground pads on the IC are probed. This provides sufficient physical room for the larger power/ground probes, and also results in about the same total force between probe array and wafer during testing (each power/ground probe is about three times stiffer than normal, but there are about three times less of these probes). Although triple skate 5504 is shown in FIGS. 55A and 55B, any multiple of skates may be utilized in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The multiple skates preferably control probe-to-pad alignment and reduce wear during cleaning. Distal end 5512 of power/ground probe 5500 can be attached to space transformer pads using one or more attachment points. For example, FIG. 55C shows probe 5500 with attachment points 5514 and 5516. FIG. 55D shows probe 5500 with single attachment point 5518.

FIGS. 56 and 57 show examples of a top view of contact uniformity probing. Referring to FIG. 56, a set of contact

24

pads having a horizontal pitch of about 110 μm is shown. The pads are arranged as a staggered set of rows, and the vertical separation between rows is also about 110 μm . FIG. 57 shows an example of a probing strategy for this array, where the signal probes have a width of about 55 μm and the power/ground probes have a width of about 165 μm . Every third pad of the power/ground lines is probed, as indicated with the darker disks. Embodiments of the present invention are not limited to these pitches, separations, and widths—the numbers above are for illustrative purposes.

Although the preceding discussion has focused on the geometry at the probe tips, these and similar ideas are also applicable to a space transformer which is typically present as the base of a probe array. Thus, a space transformer can use multiple contact points to make contact to each of the power/ground probes. Alternatively, the space transformer contact points can be larger for power/ground probes than for signal probes. FIGS. 55C and 55D show some examples of probe distal end configurations, specifically attachment points 5514, 5516, and 5518. Any combination of these approaches can also be employed.

Although some of the FIGS. illustrate rectangular or substantially rectangular or rectangular with curved end, skate geometries, other possible configurations are useful, including curved configurations.

Embodiments of the present invention can also be practiced in combination with any other way of increasing probe CCC. In particular, in one embodiment of the present invention a multiple contact point probe can be combined with the use of electrically conductive cores and/or with the use of forced gas cooling. As an example, an I/O probe of NiCo gives a CCC of about 0.55 Amps, and when this probe is used as a base for the about 3× wide design, the CCC equals about 1.65 Amps. By adding a Cu-core to the about 3× probe design, the CCC equals about 2.0 Amps. Even higher CCC can be reached by further applying forced air convection including forced chilled air convection.

Gas Cooling

The probe failure mode that is of most concern today is inelastic probe deformation that causes a probe to go out of spec (e.g., to have an out-of-spec contact force). This inelastic deformation failure mode is thermally driven, and only arises as a current driven failure mode because of resistive heating of the probe by current passing through the probe. In embodiments of the present invention, this problem is addressed by providing forced gas cooling of a probe array.

In one embodiment of the present invention, gas preferably flows in a predetermined gas flow configuration. In another embodiment of the present invention, gas flows in a single direction through an array of probes, removing heat from the probes and thus lowering the temperature of the probes, which in turn prevents the inelastic probe deformation. In another embodiment of the present invention and shown in FIG. 58, vertically separated gas flows 5800 and 5802 comprising different flow directions. Here, the vertical direction is taken to be perpendicular to wafer 5804 under test. Vertical probes 5806 are preferably employed, so each probe is in the path of both gas flows. In one preferred embodiment (FIG. 58), gas flows 5800 and 5802 are in opposite directions. In another preferred embodiment and as illustrated in FIG. 59, gas flows 5900 and 5902 are in perpendicular directions. Gas flows 5900 and 5902 of the example of FIG. 59 are at different vertical positions (e.g., as shown on FIG. 58).

25

The use of two gas flows at different vertical positions increases the turbulence of the gas flow at probes of a probe array, and it is preferred for most or all of the probes of the probe array to be surrounded by gas in unsteady or turbulent flow. Heat transfer away from the probes is significantly enhanced by having unsteady or turbulent gas flow surrounding the probes. By increasing heat transfer away from the probes in this manner, the probe current carrying capacity can be significantly increased in situations where the current capacity of a probe is thermally limited, (e.g., as described above).

In alternative embodiments of the present invention, several features can be added to this basic scheme, individually or in any combination. A first such feature is cooling the gas flow to substantially below room temperature (e.g., -25°C. , -15°C. etc.), preferably using Peltier coolers disposed in the gas flows at locations upstream of the probes being cooled. A second such feature is the use of a gas flow apparatus that provides substantially the same gas flow rate at the center and edges of the probe array being cooled. One way to accomplish this is to provide the gas flow with a suitable array of gas nozzles (e.g., having nozzles more closely spaced at the edges of the nozzle array than at the center of the nozzle array). Control of gas flow can be provided by altering nozzle shape and/or spacing (as in the examples of FIGS. 60-62). This is especially helpful in situations where the probe hot spots (where inelastic deformation/failure most easily occurs) are near the probe tips, which often occurs in practice.

A third such feature is to have some nozzles operating at positive pressures (i.e., blowing) and other nozzles operating at negative pressures (i.e., vacuuming). In this case, it is preferable that corresponding nozzles at opposite sides of the probe array have opposite operating pressures. A fourth such feature is the use of acoustic excitation to increase gas flow turbulence. A fifth such feature is to employ pulsed gas flow as opposed to a continuous steady state gas flow. These optional features preferably increase gas flow unsteadiness or turbulence, thereby improving heat transfer away from the probes.

Referring to FIGS. 60 and 61, gas nozzles preferably comprises openings that can be in the shape of holes (as in FIG. 60) and/or slots (as in FIG. 61) and/or any other shape (as in FIG. 62), including but not limited to squares, rectangles, ovals, parallelograms, hexagons, pentagons, combinations thereof and the like. The nozzle arrays for gas flows can have the same nozzle shapes or they can have different nozzle shapes. FIG. 60 illustrates a cross-section of nozzle array 6000. Holes 6002 can either be on a regular grid or an irregular grid and can be either aligned or misaligned with the "opposite" nozzle. Holes can be any shape, including but not limited to, circular, rectangular, oval, elliptical, square, combinations thereof and the like. Probe 6004 illustrates an example of how a probe is aligned against nozzle array 6000.

FIG. 61 illustrates a cross-section of nozzle array 6100. Slots 6102 can either be on a regular grid or an irregular grid and can be aligned or misaligned with the "opposite" nozzle. Slots 6102 can be any shape, including but not limited to rectangular, oval, elliptical, combinations thereof and the like. Probe 6104 illustrates an example of how a probe is aligned against array 6100.

FIGS. 63-66 illustrate examples of gas flow being circulated around and through a probe array. The gas flow is preferably circulated in a predetermined gas flow configuration. FIGS. 63-66 also show the velocity profiles of the gas flows. FIG. 63 illustrates an embodiment of the present

26

invention comprising two opposite gas flows without offset being circulated around and through a probe array. FIG. 64 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention comprising two opposite gas flows with offset. As illustrated in the drawings, the two opposite gas flows with offset has improved flow circulation around and through the probe array. FIGS. 65 and 66 illustrate an embodiment of the present invention comprising one main gas flow and two lateral reinforced gas flows. In this embodiment, the gas flow is improved, particularly around the center of the probe array. The gas flow around and through the probe array preferably comprises one main gas flow and two lateral reinforced gas flows, however that particular configuration is not required.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the gas flow is preferably moving at a velocity of approximately 0.5 to 10 ft/s. Referring to FIG. 63, the velocity of the gas flow is approximately 0.5 to 3 ft/s around the probe array and within the probe array. FIG. 64 shows a slightly increased velocity of gas flow of approximately 1 to 6 ft/s around the probe array. FIGS. 65 and 66 also show a velocity of gas flow of about 1 to 6 ft/s, as the region within the probe array has higher gas velocities than those shown in FIGS. 63 and 64. FIGS. 65 and 66 have more gas flow flowing through and around the center of the probe array.

Fine Pitch Probes Having High Current Carrying Capability and Probe Laser Machining Methods

As integrated circuit (IC) technology evolves, the spacing between chip contact pads decreases. This trend causes various difficulties for automatic chip testing using probes that make electrical contact with the chip contact pads. Generally, as the chip contact pad spacing decreases, the probes must have smaller lateral dimensions, and must be more closely spaced to match the contact pad pitch. However, it is often required for the probes to have a substantial current carrying capability, so that the probe is not destroyed if a faulty chip that draws excess current is probed. For example, a power supply probe or ground probe to a faulty chip can experience a current flow on the order of about 1 Amp, so it is highly desirable for probes to be able to withstand this level of current flow without failing destructively. In this context, it is important to note that plastic deformation of a probe is a destructive failure mode. This problem becomes increasingly acute as probe lateral dimensions decrease in order to keep pace with evolving IC technology. For example, conventional NiCo probes cannot provide a 1 Amp current carrying capability for a 90 micron probe pitch. These alloys tend to have high resistivity and low mechanical strength at elevated temperatures, which detrimentally reduces the current carrying capability.

Embodiments of the present invention provide several approaches for increasing probe current carrying capability (CCC). For example, tungsten (W) as a probe material enables high CCC, preferably about 0.9 to about 1.5 Amps and more preferably about 1 Amp, of wafer probes. This capability is especially desirable as probe pitches get smaller. Tungsten is a very good probe material because it has a very high mechanical strength at elevated temperatures while its resistivity is not too high. Therefore, as current flows through the probe, the Joule heating is relatively low while the strength of tungsten exceeds the bending stresses. It is possible to achieve 1.0 Amp CCC for about 90 μm pitch full grid array with tungsten, particularly if the distal end of the probe is short and plated or otherwise coated with about 1 μm to about 5 μm , and preferably about 1 μm to about 3 μm and more preferably about 2.5 μm of a very conductive

material, such as, for example, copper (Cu), aluminum (Al), silver (Ag) and/or gold (Au) thereby creating a heat sink.

Referring to FIG. 67, one embodiment of the present invention comprises probe 6700, which preferably comprises at least two different materials and a shortened tip as compared to probe 6702. Material 6704 is different from second material 6706 on distal end of probe 6700. Probe 6700 is preferably an approximately 1 Amp probe, while probe 6702 is about 0.65 Amp probe. As can be seen from FIG. 67, probe 6700 is shorter than probe 6702. Thus, a probe array comprising a plurality of probe 6700 can include more probes with smaller pitches.

Traditionally, tungsten (W) probes were made out of drawn wire in the shape of a cantilever beam. In order to make a probe for a full grid array, the shape of the probe is preferably substantially vertical (as opposed to a cantilever beam) and is preferably not made out of wire due to required geometrical accuracy. Also, the dimension of a probe for an area array of about 90 μm is about 40 μm ×40 μm —a very small dimension. Thus, traditional tungsten wire technology is incapable of providing W probes as considered herein. Further increase of CCC above about 1.0 Amp at about 90 μm pitch can be accomplished by creating copper-tungsten (Cu—W) mixtures.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a probe comprises a shortened distal end and/or a different second material such as, for example, copper, deposited on the distal end. The shortened distal end has a preferably length of between about 0.1 mm to about 0.5 mm and more preferably about 0.4 mm. The different second material can also optionally be deposited on a tip end. The probe of this embodiment is preferably laser-machined out of tungsten, preferably tungsten foil and is more preferably laser-machined out of about 40 μm tungsten foil. In order to increase CCC of the probe, electrical resistivity is lowered by sintering about 1 micron to about 5 microns of a second different material, such as, for example, copper, on the outside of the tungsten probe. The copper on the outside of the probe lowers the Joule heating and keeps the probe material cool. In an alternative embodiment, the different second material is sintered to a distal end and a tip end but not the “flexing” belly of the probe. This avoids delamination under cyclic probe deflection.

As can be seen in FIG. 68, a probe comprising tungsten and having a short copper distal end (about 0.1 to about 0.5 mm) coated with a different second and highly conductive material, such as copper, increases the CCC of the probe. FIG. 68 shows a graph of distal end (DE) length v. CCC@10% CF, Amps. On the other hand, a tungsten probe with a long distal end results in a lower CCC (about 0.65-0.7 Amp).

Referring to FIGS. 69A-69C, one embodiment of the present invention includes laser cut probe 6900 comprising tungsten and/or molybdenum and/or other suitable materials providing high strength at elevated temperatures with resistivity's that are not too high (see FIG. 69A). In another embodiment and shown in FIG. 69B, probe 6902 comprises the same material as probe 6900 but the distal end of probe 6902 is preferably plated or otherwise coated with different second material 6904. Alternatively, FIG. 69C shows probe 6910 which comprises probe material 6907, which can be the same or different material from probe 6900. Probe 6910 is coated with different second material 6906 at distal end of probe 6910 and/or different third material 6908 at tip end of probe 6910. Different second material 6906 and different third material 6908 can be the same or different materials. Different second material 6906 and different third material

6908 can be the same or different from probe material 6907. In one embodiment of the present invention, probe 6912 comprises tip coated or plated with different second material 6914. Probe 6912 can comprise the same or different material as probe 6900 with different second material 6914 coated over the probe material. Different second material 6904, 6906 and 6914 can be, but is not limited to, Cu, Al, Ag, Au, rhodium (Rh), rhenium (Re), and/or ruthenium (Ru), and/or an alloy, for example, copper beryllium and/or a member of the platinum element group or other suitable materials that are either high in conductivity or are corrosion-resistive and strong. Different third material 6908 can be but is not limited to, Cu, Al, Ag, Au, Rh, Re, and/or Ru, and/or an alloy, for example, copper beryllium and/or a member of the platinum element group. The flexing portion of the probe of this embodiment preferably has no material plated to avoid peeling due to probe flexing. Alternatively, the flexing portion of the probe comprises a thinner layer of a different second material than the distal end and/or tip end to allow for flexing. The different second material can comprise a highly conductive material, for example, Cu, Ag, Au and/or Al. The different second material can also optionally comprise a highly conductive alloy, for example, a copper beryllium alloy. In one embodiment of the present invention, the tip of probe 6910 comprises a different third material, for example, a member of the platinum element group, rhodium (Rh), rhenium (Re), and/or ruthenium (Ru). Different third material 6908 is preferably corrosion-resistive and strong so it can withstand the repeated contact with multiple devices under test.

In one embodiment, a probe comprises a skate disposed on a probe tip. The skate is preferably coated with a very hard and non-oxidizing material so that it is very strong and can take mechanical stresses when contacting multiple devices under test over the life of the probe. In this embodiment of the present invention, the material coating the skate is preferably rhodium (Rh), rhenium (Re) and/or ruthenium (Ru) or metal alloys or a member of the platinum element group or other similar materials. The body of the probe is then preferably springy and strong and can take mechanical stresses. The distal end of this embodiment preferably does not flex and is coated with a very conductive material to improve conductivity, CCC, thermal and electrical properties and allow the probe to carry more current. The distal end is optionally coated with a copper beryllium alloy.

In one embodiment of the present invention and referring to FIG. 75, trench 7500 is laser cut into a distal end of probe 7502. Trench 7500 can extend the entire probe length or be stopped where mechanical stresses are large. Trench 7500 can be shallow or deep. Laser cut trenches are optionally disposed with conductive metals, alloys, or other conductive materials, for example, copper, to increase the CCC of the probe. The conductive material is preferably disposed in trench 7500 through electroplating, electrodepositing or sputtering. Copper core 7504 in trench 7500 at the distal end of probe 7506 enables solder reflow to probe 7506. Probe 7506 with copper filled trench 7500 can optionally be over-plated with copper and sintered. Probe 7506 can optionally include trench 7508 at tip 7510. Although copper is described herein as the conductive material disposed in the trench, other metals, alloys or other conductive materials can also be used to fill trenches 7500 and 7508 including but not limited to Al, Ag, Au, Re, Ru, Rd, and/or a member of the platinum element group and/or metal alloys. The conductive materials preferably decrease overall probe resistivity and increase CCC.

One embodiment of the present invention comprises a probe having a composition of about 40% Cu 60% W metal. Other similar compositions, such as Cu_xW_{1-x} , with $0.1 \leq x \leq 0.4$ are also included in this embodiment. The probes of this embodiment are preferably made using powder metallurgy, and the resulting structure is preferably a mixed-phase composite (e.g., regions of copper (Cu) mixed with regions of W), as opposed to a single-phase alloy. The matrix of this embodiment provides a strong mechanical lattice with high strength at elevated temperature, while the conductive material lowers the resistivity by about 35% at elevated temperatures. This way, the Joule heating is minimized while the mechanical strength at temperature remains very high. Another benefit of CuW probes are the low contact resistance between the probe tip and the chip, because of the conductive Cu being at the contact point between the probe and the chip contact bump/pad. However, CuW probes cannot be etched. Each component requires very different chemistry. For example, what etches Cu does not etch W and vice versa. Cu is preferably sintered onto the W probe.

One embodiment of the present invention comprises a probe having a tungsten copper mix of about 10% Cu to about 90% W. A molybdenum copper mix is also contemplated. Other additives are optionally used to lower resistivity and to manage thermal expansion of the mixed chemistry. The probes of this embodiment are preferably plated or coated with conductive metals such as, but not limited to, Cu, Al, Ag, or Au. To avoid peeling in the flexing area, the thickness of the deposited metal is preferably reduced or alternatively, the deposited metal is eliminated in the flexing area of the probe.

Another embodiment of the present invention comprises a probe made from a high CCC material, such as, but not limited to tungsten and molybdenum. An alloy, preferably a copper beryllium alloy, is then coated or plated over the probe and is preferably coated or plated over at least the distal end of the probe. When a probe comprising a copper beryllium coating on the distal end is used during testing, if the current becomes too high during testing, the probe disengages or deforms mechanically and does not carry more current than it is capable of and therefore does not have the potential to cause damage to the device under test by exploding and/or causing dust.

Laser machining is a preferable way to fabricate probes. Laser micromachining is enabled by utilizing a nanosecond or picosecond laser as well as special fixturing that enables proper holding of the probe material. The probe material is preferably a metal plate or metal foil. The fixturing elevates the material over a surface so the laser does not penetrate the surface while cutting the probe material. The fixturing enables the laser beam to go into open space as it passes through to cut the probe material. This technique eliminates "back-splash", which is the re-deposition of molten metal onto itself that causes geometrical inaccuracies. The metal plate or metal foil probe material is mounted such that there is nothing directly underneath and touching the metal plate or foil probe material. Thus, if there is splashing from a surface on which the metal plate or metal foil probe material is disposed above, it does not redeposit on the probe material. The probe material is preferably held by its edges and supported by small columns. There is preferably nothing that the laser can penetrate underneath the metal plate or metal foil probe material and thus there is no bounce back molten material. The metal plate or metal foil probe material is preferably fixed above a surface (preferably fixed above a surface about 1 mm). A nitrogen and argon gas flush is

alternatively used to avoid oxidation. FIGS. 70A and 70B provide further details relating to laser machining in this context.

Referring to FIG. 70A, one embodiment of the present invention comprises a method of laser machine manufacturing a probe. FIG. 70A is a flow chart illustrating how probe design and probe material come together. The method comprises producing a CAD drawing of desired probe design 7001. The CAD drawing is then input into a computer and software converts the drawing into X and Y dimension measurements for a laser to follow when manufacturing a probe. The computer then communicates the X and Y coordinates to the laser. The laser then follows the contour of the measurements to manufacture a laser probe shape. The other side of the flowchart illustrates how the probe material is chosen and tested. Desired material 7002 is preferably a metal foil material and more preferably a tungsten foil material. Material 7002 is tested at 7004 to insure it meets specified requirements such as, but not limited to, thickness, flatness, surface composition and material composition. If 7002 meets the desired specifications, particularly a thickness parameter, it is then cleaned and prepped at 7006 for laser machining. CAD drawing 7001, in the meantime, provides laser machining parameters 7008, such as, but not limited to, probe material, material thickness, and desired taper to the laser. Material 7002 is then laser machined 7010 into a probe. The probe is then tested 7012 and, if passes, is harvested 7013 and goes to probe assembly 7014. FIG. 70B illustrates examples of laser machined cross-sections and laser machined probes. These examples illustrate the high quality of the laser machined cuts.

FIG. 70B illustrates laser beam 7016 from the tip down. Laser beam preferably penetrates and cuts through the metal plate or metal foil probe material. The thickness of the probe material is preferably about 20 microns to about 100 microns, and is preferably between about 30 microns and about 80 microns. The laser beam preferably cuts out the contour of the probe as created from a CAD drawing. Probes 7018 are shown still attached to the metal plate or metal foil probe material. "Rabbit ears" 7020 are created so that the laser when cutting can avoid 90 degree turns, which causes increased acceleration and decreased accuracy when cutting. Rabbit ears 7020 are smooth to allow the laser beam to go through the probe material and make a smooth turn. When laser machine manufacturing a probe, the laser preferably penetrates and cuts the probe material about 2 microns deep all the way around the contour of the probe. The laser then makes several rounds of cuts of the contour until the metal plate or metal foil probe material is cut through. In other words, the laser does not cut through the metal foil or metal plate probe material in one pass. It takes several passes of the laser to cut through the metal foil or metal plate probe material. A nano- or picosecond laser is suitable for machining probes and preferably cuts a few microns deep all the way around the perimeter of a probe and then cuts another few microns deep all the way around. It may take, for example, twenty passes with the laser to create a 40 micron thickness probe. The final resulting probe is shown as probe 7028 and probe 7030. As a result of this laser machining method, the side surface of a probe is very smooth. Compare probes 7022 and 7024 of FIG. 70B with FIG. 71 vertical sides to see the accuracy of the laser cuts. Openings 7026 allow a probe to be plated with a different second material and/or different third material on a distal end and/or tip end. Once a probe is completed being laser machined, it goes into a probe assembly.

31

Referring to FIG. 71, etching of probes produces non-uniform walls and cross-sections. A pitch of about 90 μm or less, in full grid array layout, requires tight control of the probe dimension. FIG. 72A shows an etched probe width distribution with a standard deviation of approximately 6.1. FIG. 72B shows a laser micromachined probe width distribution that results in a much narrower width distribution with a standard deviation of about 1. Etched probes have a poor yield of about 25%, as seen in FIGS. 72A and 72B. There is about a 90% critical dimension (CD) yield by laser micromachining. Thus, laser machined probes in particular, W probes and CuW probes result in a uniform cross-section and tight control of dimensions, as seen in the photographs of laser machined probes in FIG. 73. Another benefit of using laser micromachining is the ability to “sculpt” the surface of the probe material. This technique allows for creating 3-dimensional features such as narrower contact tips and skates needed to increase force/area and thus decrease contact resistance—see FIGS. 74A and 74B. For example, normal laser beam cuts sides 7400. In this embodiment, a laser beam is used to create step 7402 in the thickness of the probe. This technique can be regarded as analogous to milling with a laser, where each pass of the laser removes a small amount of material (e.g., about 3-5 μm). Such laser milling can be used to define various probe features, such as reduced-width probe tips. Referring to FIG. 74B, skate 7404 disposed on probe tip 7406 can be created using laser micromachining. Skate 7404 contacts a wafer during testing. Step 7402 is created by a laser removing a thickness of the probe material to result in an offset skate. FIGS. 76A and 76B illustrate probes having offset skate 7606. To create centrally located skate 7404, the laser removes a thickness from both sides of a probe. FIG. 74B illustrates probe material being removed to create a skate. Skate 7404 is centrally located which requires the probe to be flipped in order to remove thickness from both sides of the probe. As shown in FIGS. 76A and 76B, skate 7606 is off center and thus does not require a flip during laser machining for producing the skate.

Referring to the probe shown in FIG. 76A, distal end 7602 is preferably thinner than body 7604 as distal end 7602 is attached to a substrate via solder reflow to allow for testing. When a pitch of a probe is very small, it is desirable for the end of the distal portion to be smaller in diameter. Solder is attached to the substrate part, the distal end goes into a solder bump, and if distal end has a cross section that is too large, there can be electrical shorting. The taper on distal end 7602 is manufactured using laser machining and prevents electrical shorting when connecting to a substrate part. The same method as describe above for step 7402 and skate 7404 is also used to taper distal end 7602. The laser machining method can cut thicknesses of probes as well as widths of probes when contouring.

FIGS. 77A and 77B illustrate probe 7700 having chisel 7702. In this embodiment, when probe 7700 is being manufactured by laser machining from a metal plate or metal foil material, chisel 7702 is part of the contour shape being cut. In this embodiment, chisel tip 7702 is made during the manufacturing of probe 7700. Chisel tip 7702 is preferably located in the approximate center of the end of probe 7700.

One embodiment of the present invention comprises a method of laser machining probes. This method preferably comprises producing non-linear optical absorption pulse with a laser, preferably a nanosecond or a picosecond laser. The pulse results in a peak power that make it possible to produce high quality and accurate laser drilled features. In one embodiment of the present invention, nanosecond end/

32

or picosecond pulses are combined with a small spot size (small spot size is the size of the laser beam light that is used to cut through the material when making a probe) to produce high accurate cuts. The width of the cut through material is approximately equal to size of spot. Thus, spot size is preferably small to cut small parts, preferably a spot size less than approximately 20 microns, produces high irradiances (preferably greater than about 1 terrawatt (TW)/ cm^2). Small spot size allows for enhanced absorption of the incident laser light. The enhanced absorption improves the laser micromachining quality. A short wavelength [nano-(10^{-9}) and pico wavelength (10^{-12})] does not cut through a probe material in one pass, but gently removes a thin layer of probe material during each pass. Each cut is precise without causing stress to the probe material so that individual photons have enough photon energy so that fewer photons are required to excite individual electrons across a bandgap. It is preferable to have localized removal of probe material. In one embodiment, about 2 microns of probe material is removed per laser pass in order to prevent overheating the probe material and thereby damaging the material. Picosecond lasers are preferable due to the increased optical absorption of shorter pulse durations which produce high edge quality. See, for example, FIG. 73.

Referring to FIG. 78, probe 7800 is shown attached to frame 7802 after being laser machine manufactured. In FIG. 78, distal end 7804 is attached to frame 7802 on a side of distal end 7804, a vertical side of distal end 7804. Probe 7800 is then snipped from frame 7802 without creating inaccuracy by creating a variance in dimension. In an alternative embodiment, probe 7800 can be cut from frame 7802 with a laser.

In an embodiment of the present invention, tooth 7806 of frame 7802 is attached to probe 7800 on a vertical side of distal end 7804 of probe 7800 instead of the very tip of distal end 7804. The tip of the distal end of the probe is cut to precise dimensions. If a metal is deposited at the very tip of the distal end, snipping at that location and exposing the metal under the coating can cause errors. Snipping probe 7800 off frame 7802 at tooth 7806 prevents errors since this portion of probe 7800 is not critical. The base metal that is exposed in that area does not cause errors.

Another embodiment of the present invention comprises an ultrashort laser pulse ablation method that emits particles up to several hundred nanoseconds after a laser pulse. A thin surface layer on the order of the optical penetration depth is ablated from a probe material by electron emission, sublimation and transition to the plasma state. This ablation proceeds on a nanosecond time scale or faster. The remaining heat diffuses into the probe material and leads to the emission of particles and droplets after several nanoseconds, preferably between 1 and 100 nanoseconds, and more preferably between 5 and 50 nanoseconds and most preferably approximately 10 nanoseconds due to a thermal boiling process. Note that the material ejected from the probe in the initial ablation step preferably carries away much of the deposited laser energy, especially when working close to the ablation threshold, thereby minimizing the amount of thermal energy that later diffuses into the probe material. Only for femtosecond (the SI unit of time equal to about 10^{-15} of a second) pulses does the thermal energy diffuse into the probe material, and it preferably leads to reduced collateral damage to the probe material surrounding the ablation zone.

Although the invention has been described in detail with particular reference to these preferred embodiments, other embodiments can achieve the same results. Variations and modifications of the present invention will be obvious to

33

those skilled in the art and it is intended to cover in the appended claims all such modifications and equivalents. The entire disclosures of all references, applications, patents, and publications cited above are hereby incorporated by reference.

What is claimed is:

1. A probe for testing a device comprising:
a distal end;
a flexing portion, and
a tip end;
wherein said probe comprises a first material having sufficient current carrying capability to prevent damage to said probe when experiencing an over-current condition due to a faulty device; and
wherein only said distal end of said probe, including the sides of said distal end of said probe, comprises a coating of a conductive second material.
2. The probe of claim 1 wherein said distal end is between 0.1 mm and 0.5 mm in length.
3. The probe of claim 1 wherein said conductive second material comprises copper.
4. The probe of claim 1 wherein said first material comprises tungsten.
5. The probe of claim 1 wherein said first material comprises molybdenum.
6. The probe of claim 1 wherein said probe body comprises a trench.

34

7. The probe of claim 6 wherein said trench comprises a metal.

8. The probe of claim 7 wherein said metal comprises copper.

9. The probe of claim 1 wherein said first material comprises a mixed-phase composite.

10. The probe of claim 1 wherein said conductive second material comprises aluminum.

11. The probe of claim 1 comprising a skate disposed on said tip end.

12. The probe of claim 11 wherein said skate comprises said first material.

13. The probe of claim 11 wherein said skate is coated with a third material different from said first material and said conductive second material.

14. The probe of claim 13 wherein said third material comprises rhodium.

15. The probe of claim 13 wherein said third material comprises rhenium.

16. The probe of claim 13 wherein said third material comprises ruthenium.

17. The probe of claim 1 wherein said conductive second material comprises gold.

18. The probe of claim 1 wherein said conductive second material comprises silver.

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